ALL THE JANATA MEN

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

All the Prime Minister's Men, 1977

All the Janata Men

Janardan Thakur



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To Sohini

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Preface

EVEN BEFORE I had finished writing *All the Prime Minister's Men,* the Janata Men had begun impelling me to write about them, so swift was the beginning of their follies and foibles The same disregard for promises, the same life-style, the same jockeying for power, the same cliques and manoeuvres, the same impatience with constitutional proprieties, the same old brazenness of the so-called "sons and daughters of the revolution," the same old wheeler-dealers hanging around the corridors of power Little seemed to have changed One dictator replaced by another dictator-in-the-making, one court jester replaced by another, a shade more buffoonish, a Sanjay replaced by Kanti Desai, a Bansi Lal by Devi Lal! And all the Chandra Swamis and P N Kapoors and Jai Gurudevs were back in business again

In late March 1977, I had seen the great tornado of Rae Bareli that had swept the mightiest of the land into what looked like the limbo of history In June 1977 I saw the Rae Bareli tide sweeping back to wash the Janata away Such swing in the people's mood in just a matter of months was hard to imagine It was the result of utter buffoonery and woodenness on the part of the queer "Hanuman" of our times whom we had all hailed as a giant-killer of Rae Bareli Even more dismal was the state of the administration in state after state, with only the far-away Marxist-run West Bengal showing signs of having a government Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar—the very heartland of the great revolt against the Congress—had acquired faceless non-governments Political cannibalism had returned with a bang All one could see was the debris of the dream of a "total revolution "

The question being asked all around was, "Will she come back?"

The fear got blown out of all proportions as the new rulers dragged from one blunder to another With little concern for getting on with the essential tasks, they frittered their energies in ridiculous fripperies, making a laughing-stock of themselves Even the mighty ones who had come trailing clouds of virtue and administrative acumen showed themselves to be hollow. stuffed men Yes, it was time to get back to the typewriter

But where did one begin? Freedom, they said, had come back with a bang But the minds were still full of fear "Don't you dare write about the Janata men," some warned 'They are the men in power!" It was time to test the freedom, too

This is not a comprehensive gallery of the Janata Men Indeed, many important men would seem to have been left out To have put them all together would have taken a fat volume, not worth the candle One presumes there are enough of them here to give a fairly representative view of them Often, the emphasis of the portraits is on the past of the Janata leaders, but this is because their 80 or 75 or 50 years are far more important than the one year they have just gone through There can be no understanding of their present or their future without an understanding of their past (Bio-data of the principal characters have been appended)

Before I leave you to the book, I must thank my friends and senior colleagues without whose help and guidance this could not have been written I want particularly to mention Nikhil Chakravartty, Ganesh Shukla, Girish Mathur, Ranajit Roy, H K Dua, and M P Sinha who were always willing to share with me their wide knowledge of men and matters I must add that the responsibility for any errors of fact and judgement is not theirs

I must also thank my friends in Lucknow, Ahmedabad, Bombay, Bangalore, and other cities who gave me their time and valuable suggestions

A very special thanks goes out to my brother, Madhusudan Thakur, whose presence I felt throughout the exercise

I am also beholden to my children who were always around to help with whatever they could The little one, Richa, eight months older than she was last time, was not satisfied with playing under the table now She wanted to be at the typewriter, and I have no doubt she would have done a better job of it

JANARDAN THAKUR

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Backdrop—"The Sin of Merger"

"WE'VE ESCAPED the sin of merger," Morarji Desai told Piloo Mody with a sigh of relief soon after his release from prison on 18 January 1977 The March elections had been announced just that day A merger of the Opposition parties seemed out of question Time was too short Something that couldn't be done in years, couldn't happen in weeks All for the best, thought Desai At 81, he was as much a bundle of rigidities as ever He had gone into the wilderness, his party knocked to bits, but he could not think of being anything but a Congressman To others in the Opposition, he appeared to be fighting for the tattered flag of a lost cause To him it was an act of faith

But for Jayaprakash Narayan, the erstwhile priest of partyless democracy, a merger of the Opposition parties had become an even greater act of faith His reputation, his pride, his place in history, all this had come to hinge on that one essential step—merger "Either fight the elections as one party or I will have nothing to do with them," threatened the Opposition Godfather This time the threat worked

Chaudhuri Charan Singh, a man of vaulting ambition, who had twice wangled the Chief Ministership of Uttar Pradesh and set his sights on the Delhi throne, was all set to become the chief of any new party with some potential He had been told by some double-tongued Opposition leaders that the top post would naturally fall to him This had been a strategy to keep Charan Singh from jumping on the Indira bandwagon, which he had been itching to do for some time His loyal lieutenants had seen through the game, and warned him again and again, not to be taken in by the promises

"Don't go, they will never make you the party Chairman," his sup-

porters pleaded with him on 20 January 1977, when the first meeting of the Opposition parties was called at 5 Dupleix Road, Morarji Desai's residence Desai was also to hold a Press conference "Morarji will become the *de facto* leader of the Opposition parties, and if you are there, you would willy-nilly have to accept it," argued Charan Singh's men He was in two minds, but at the last moment, the two Jana Sangh leaders, Atal Behari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani, went rushing to the UP Niwas and cajoled Charan Singh to attend the meeting How could the Opposition parties have any worthwhile meeting without him? Hadn't he been the moving spirit behind most of the past efforts towards merger? High and mighty, but gullible, the old BLD chieftain was carried away When he reached 5 Dupleix Road, he found that Morarji had already started acting like the Chairman of the Opposition combine

"Don't accept this humiliation," his supporters told him when he got back from the meeting JP would never choose him to lead the party, they argued They gave him the reasons why His opposition to the JP movement, his differences on methods, his debunking of the "total revolution" slogan, and a whole world of difference between the attitudes of the two men "Tell them you don't agree to this sort of merger, tell them you can only have an electoral alliance"

Charan Singh was inclined to agree with his supporters, but he felt weighed down by the thought of the adverse public opinion that his action might create He said if he backed out, he would be condemned by all, and even some of his political allies might not go along with him But he would certainly raise the question of the party leadership He would not let it go like that

And he did raise it at the next meeting "*Pahle leadership ka sawal tai ho jana chahiye*" (The question of leadership should be settled first), he said The Socialist leader, S M Joshi, immediately took Charan Singh out into the lawn It was very unfair, Charan Singh told him, to leave the question of leadership hanging in the air "I don't mind if it is left to Jayaprakashji," he said, still hoping that he might, after all, be the Sarvodaya leader's choice Joshi immediately pulled out a letter from his pocket It was from JP, who had written that he wanted Morarji Desai to be the Chairman of the new party

A couple of days later, on 23 January 1977, a milling crowd of journalists and cameramen, exhilarated by their unexpected freedom, elbowed and jostled, and shouted in the drawing room of Morarji Desai The Janata Party was being launched In the centre of the divan sat a sick and

swollen faced JP, frail but happy, flanked by Morarji Desai and Chaudhuri Charan Singh, the Chairman and Deputy Chairman respectively of the new party Not once during the meeting did the mighty leader from Uttar Pradesh utter a word He sat glum and tight-lipped, only his sharp, suspicious eyes kept darting around You could see the whole thing was a bit too thick for him His cup of misery was full

He almost wept when he returned to the UP Niwas *"Sari zindagi ki kamai barbad ho gai"* (All the earnings of my life are lost), he bewailed to his supporters *"Ab mujhe C B Gupta jaise logon ke liye vote mangna padega"* (I'll now have to seek votes for men like C B Gupta) He was bursting with indignation

Filled with a sense of *deja vu*, his followers came up with a new proposition *"Achcha to saare uttar Bharat men ticket ka batwara aapke haath hona chahiye"* (All right, but the ticket distribution for the whole of northern India should be done by you) This sounded good to Charan Singh After all, it was the post-election situation that mattered most Unless he could give tickets to his own trusted men, and unless they were elected, there was no point in just being the Chairman of the new party His old political ally, Biju Patnaik of Orissa, carried the new Charan Singh formula to Morarji Desai and other members of the party's National Committee They accepted it.

This was some consolation to Charan Singh, by no means, fully assuaged To pump him up a bit, as also to ingratiate themselves with the man who was going to distribute the Lok Sabha tickets, two senior leaders of the Jana Sangh told him, *"Morarjibhai ko to D K Barooah banaya hai, Indira to aap honge"* (Morarjibhai has been made only D K. Barooah, it is you who will be Indira)

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It was Indira Gandhi who unwittingly gave birth to the Janata Party It was the people, the "sleeping Leviathan" of India, who suddenly rose in a mass upsurge with the Janata flag at its crest But for the travail of the Emergency and the surprise that Indira Gandhi sprung on the Opposition, the Janata Party would perhaps have remained a dream child It was as though a window had been flung open, and a draught of breeze had gushed into the sealed chamber that was India Quickly the breeze turned into a wind, and then a gale, and finall, a tornado, and before you realized what was happening, all the high and mighty

had been swept off their feet Within a matter of weeks, the benighted gentlemen of the Opposition had been rocketed from the slough of despond to the dizzy heights of unexpected triumph Power had come to them on a platter The victors were as dazed as the vanquished "But for the mass upsurge, even a thousand JPs could not have achieved it," said Jayaprakash Narayan in the hour of victory

They had been at it for years and years, the leaders of the then Opposition All sorts of permutations and combinations had been tried—united fronts, grand alliances, janata *morchas*, and the most bizarre of political patchworks Nothing had clicked Now and then they had nibbled at the periphery of the Congress cake, but they never really got a good bite at it

The elections of 1967 gave non-Congressism a measure of success, but even before the end of a year, the nine states began slipping one by one The United Front Governments of 1967 failed not only because of the machinations and manoeuvres of Indira Gandhi and her men, but even more because of their inbuilt contradictions Most of them ended with a load of bitterness among the constituent parties

Not that the efforts to combine against the Congress were ever given up Many were trying in their own different ways Each of them has his own story of the exasperating exercises, his own views on how and why the efforts got stalled or torpedoed and, in retrospect, his own claim to having played the "key role" in bringing the disparate elements together

One day in early 1969, Piloo Mody telephoned Morarji Desai, who was then the Finance Minister in the undivided Congress Government Morarji was in the thick of work, but he took the phone "When do you ever have leisure?" asked Mody, the voluble, voluminous leader of the Swatantra Party "When you have some time, I need one full hour with you Please let me know"

A few days later Piloo met Morarji, and made his overtures Things could not go on as they were, Piloo argued They had to think in terms of a realignment Morarji was by no means in a happy situation He was under growing attack in Parliament Madhu Limaye, the Socialist leader, had mounted a tirade against his son, Kantilal Desai And even his own partyman, Chandra Shekhar, who was on way to becoming a "Young Turk" in those days, had been accusing him of standing in the way of an inquiry into the affairs of Birla House What galled him most was the "ambivalent attitude" of Indira Gandhi Morarji felt she was not doing anything to "pull up her supporters who were criticizing me publicly

in a very loose manner "[1] She was doing the opposite

Why was he taking it all? Piloo couldn't understand He accused Morarji of ' playing ball ' with Indira Gandhi He was obviously trying to provoke Morarji Desai into taking some drastic step, but it didn't work All he got was a cold reply from Morarji, "I am too old to start a new party now Mahatma Gandhi could do it I can't "

The turn of events forced him and his friends to go their separate ways On the eve of the 1971 Lok Sabha elections, leaders of the Congress (O), the Jana Sangh and the Swatantra Party met at Chandigarh, and decided to form an alliance to fight the polls The Socialists were not to be a part of the alliance But later, some elements of the Congress (O) in Bihar insisted that no arrangement excluding the Socialists should be made Some of them descended like storm-troopers on S Nijalingappa, the Congress (O) President, and virtually forced him into accepting the Socialists Several Swatantrites and Jana Sangh men flew into a rage over this "pollution" of what came to be known as the Grand Alliance It was "neither grand nor alliance" was the wry comment of Balraj Madhok, a former President of the Jana Sangh who later parted company with the party

Going by the results, it was certainly far from grand The agreements between the partners were grossly violated, and to put it mildly, there was cheating on all sides It was a fiasco So great was the 1971 euphoria that Opposition politics for the next year or so remained in a state of dazed perplexity As Piloo Mody puts it, "I sat on a sofa and gazed at the ceiling I almost resigned And then some of us in Parliament took up little hammers and began chiselling at her (Indira's) massive nose "

In Uttar Pradesh, Charan Singh was licking his wounds His party, the Bharatiya Kranti Dal, had fought the 1971 elections alone, and he himself had been trounced in his stronghold, Muzaffarnagar, the very heart of Jatland Proud of his solid, invincible base, he found it hard to get over his fall He felt demoralized, and grew sulky and pessimistic about the future of his party [2] Through defections and guile, which became the hallmarks of post 1967 politics, Charan Singh had twice wangled the Chief Ministership of Uttar Pradesh In the mid term poll of 1969, when he hadn't done quite as well as he had expected, he won 99 seats for the BKD But by 1973, through a process which he had himself begun, his party was reduced to a strength of 42—one short of the

[1] Morarji Desai, *The Story of My Life*

[2] A lieutenant of Charan Singh in an interview with the author

required number to be recognized as an Opposition party He needed the help of an Independent member, Bhanu Pratap Singh, to escape the shame of being reduced to a leader of a non party

With the Assembly elections of 1974 round the corner, Charan Singh was anxious to form a united Opposition party Biju Patnaik, the colourful adventurer, went over to Lucknow to help Charan Singh build a bridge with his old rival, Chandra Bhanu Gupta, the Congress (O) boss in UP From Delhi came Asoka Mehta, who had travelled from the PSP to the charmed circle of Indira Gandhi to the Presidentship of the Organization Congress Much as the negotiators tried, they failed to soften the angularities and mutual prejudices of the two UP chieftains There was no meeting point Neither would accept the second position Asked if he would have any objection to Charan Singh becoming the leader of a united Opposition party in the state, and also the Chief Minister, in case, the party won at the polls, C B Gupta told newsmen, "Let Mr Charan Singh and his followers join the Congress (O) first It will then be for the Congress (O) Party to decide who should be the leader"[3] He did not see any point in "outsiders" trying to help them negotiate "We are not a coy, newly married couple who need the help of others to bring them together Meaningful talks can be held only after friends like Mr Asoka Mehta and Mr Biju Patnaik have left" Biju left a disappointed man

In February 1973, Biju Patnaik approached Jayaprakash Narayan to lead an all India front to provide an alternative to the Congress But JP promptly pricked the bubble He agreed that nobody having concern for human liberties and democracy could be happy about the political situation in the country Even so, he could not accept Patnaik's invitation, because he believed that no Opposition front would succeed unless it was "principled and not opportunistic" Any such front, he emphasized, "must not be consumed by mere negative aims such as *Indira Hatao*, but place before the people a positive policy and programme"[4] Eventually, he spearheaded a combined Opposition attack whose sole aim was *Indira Hatao* If the Janata Party had anything positive to place before the people, it sprang from the misdeeds of Indira Gandhi

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[3] *The Statesman*, 8 August 1973
[4] Minoo Masani, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 19 May 1974

JP has been an enigma to many, perhaps even to himself He has travelled many roads, but almost every time he has hit upon a blind alley From Leninism and Marxism to Socialism to Vinoba's *Bhoodan* and *Jeevandan*, JP has journeyed through a tortuous course, the rationale of it not easily understood by even his supporters and followers Said a poem he wrote in jail, in 1975

When success was close at hand
I pushed it off my path—
Was that a folly? No
What the world deems failure
Were in reality
Steps towards rectification

A strange dissenter with a maverick's touch, he has had a queer penchant for championing lost causes Since his early break with the Congress in the thirties, Jayaprakash Narayan grew more and more isolated not only from the mainstream of the country's politics but also from the realities of the post-Independence India He often seemed like a voyager in a cloud cuckoo-land

One of the brightest stars of the Quit India movement, idolized by the youth, JP has never held power But, at no point in his career, has he really been out of the power game He has been a believer in a different kind of politics, though As he himself told an American journalist way back in 1963, despite his announced retirement from "party and politics," he was engaged in politics "from head to foot, trying all the time to change its entire complexion "[5] It was only natural that he should gradually drift away from Jawaharlal Nehru who was immersed from head to foot in the crasser sort of politics, which JP seemingly abhorred In 1948, Jawaharlal had described him as a "future Prime Minister of India," but by the mid fifties, JP had become too much of a gadfly for him And by then, Nehru had developed other ideas about a successor for himself—people closer to his heart He had started accusing JP of playing "hide-and-seek between the pillars of politics and *Bhoodan* "

It was, at least partly, the queer love-hate relationship between the two which explained not only JP's drift from the mainstream of politics but also much of what JP said and did in the years after Independence

[5]Welles Hangen, *After Nehru Who?*

To understand the makings of this leader, now hailed by some as the "second Gandhi" of India one must go back to the days of the freedom movement when JP was a fiery young revolutionary, the days when he was second only to Jawaharlal Nehru It is hard to understand JP properly except in relation to the Nehrus and the fact that Jawaharlal became the "chosen one" of Mahatma Gandhi quite early in the freedom movement Much of JP's political career was fashioned by that one fact of history

JP had quit college in the early twenties at the call of Mahatma Gandhi Jawaharlal was not only thirteen years older than him, but had also an advantage over him by the accident of his birth with a silver spoon in his mouth He had had British governesses, and had gone to Harrow and Cambridge He could speak and write beautiful English, and was thrown into the front ranks of leadership right from the start Jayaprakash, too was bright and handsome, so handsome that old people in Bihar still talk about his good looks But he came from a lower middle class family of Sitab Diara, a remote village amidst the shifting sands of Bihar UP border a backwash of civilization Even so, JP was not to be held back by the circumstances of birth or such other mundane considerations He put together some money from various sources, left his young wife in the charge of Kasturba, and sailed to the United States of America, where for eight years, he struggled through various places of work and temples of learning His wife, Prabhavati, was the daughter of one of the closest associates of Dr Rajendra Prasad, and an ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi But JP, the young starry-eyed wayfarer, was already turning into a fiery Marxist who, at one point, described Gandhi as "a bourgeois reformist, mired in a bog of timid economic analysis, good intentions, and ineffectual moralizing"

Though critical of Gandhi, JP would never fail to bend and touch his feet, an act for which his friend and associate, Minoo Masani, often teased him Masani called him something of a "Hindu Marxist," which was only one of the several contradictory strands in JP's make-up The seeds of a future Gandhian were present even at that time Discerning people could sense the ambivalent relationship between JP and Gandhi Prabhavati was like a daughter to Gandhi and Kasturba, and they considered JP as their son in law Even so, there was some sort of a psychological block in their relationship, which could have been a result of Gandhi's special equation with Jawaharlal Perhaps even the Mahatma was taken in by the dazzle of the Nehrus

By the time Jawaharlal died, JP had long passed the stage of becom-

ing the Prime Minister The job passed to much smaller men than himself (not excluding Indira Gandhi, the "only man" in her cabinet) He could no longer contend for the post It was perhaps beneath his dignity even to try Nor did he aspire for a "Bharat Ratna", not for him these prizes given by "smaller men" He had to look for something higher, and his quest took him from one mission to another By the early seventies, he had reached a point of ennui He was not sure if he was getting anywhere He wanted to withdraw completely for a while, perhaps to chart out his future course "I want to be left absolutely alone so that I can take rest, do some thinking, writing, and reading," he declared in October 1972

It was in the midst of this one-year 'retreat" that Biju Patnaik tried to draw JP out into an open confrontation with Indira Gandhi For JP, the time had not come yet



Came the UP elections of February 1974—a watershed in the country's recent political history The little hammers of the Opposition leaders in Parliament had slowly but steadily disfigured the "massive nose" quite a bit Indira had been fast losing her post-1971 elan The hollowness of her *Garibi Hatao* slogan had been exposed An all-round erosion of her popularity was evident. On the other hand, the Opposition parties seemed to have forgotten the hard drubbing of 1971 A new hope surged through them They flexed their muscles for an all out war on her, and they were determined to make Uttar Pradesh their first battleground

In April 1973, Morarji Desai was making an impassioned appeal to the people to overthrow Indira Gandhi He predicted that the UP elections would determine her fate She would be routed, and a national government, a much better government, would be formed[6]

About the same time, Piloo Mody was telling the people in Madras that his party had decided to fight the UP elections "in force," because "we believe UP is the key to Delhi"[7]

The most strident was the Jana Sangh, which was claiming that it was now prepared for a direct confrontation with the Congress The test for the Jana Sangh would be the next UP elections, the party Pre-

[6]*The Statesman*, 3 April 1973
[7][illegible]

sident, L K Advani quite boldly said, at Kanpur[8]

Not to be left behind was Chaudhuri Charan Singh He had failed with the Congress (O), because C B Gupta just would not accept his veiled but clear objective—*ensure that he would become the next Chief* Minister of UP and the overall master of the united party He believed in a personality-based party, and he could not imagine there could be a better man to head a party and government than himself Having failed with the Congress (O), he had brought about another electoral alliance of the BKD, the SSP, and the Muslim Majlis And before formalizing it, he had wrested a joint declaration duly signed by all the leaders concerned It threw sufficient light on why C B Gupta could not come to terms with him Said the joint declaration of the BKD, the SSP, and the Muslim Majlis—"The parties mentioned above will contest the elections under the leadership of Chaudhuri Charan Singh, and will form the government under his leadership The elections will be contested under one common symbol, that is, *haldar* "

Haldar flags and posters were far more ubiquitous in UP in 1974 than they were in the Lok Sabha elections of March 1977 In the dusty little town of Ballia, a bunch of sturdy peasants sat below a man-and-plough tableau singing—"*Main Dilli chala jaunga tum dekhte rahiyo*" (You wait and see I'll go off to Delhi)—a variation of a then popular Hindi film song Even in those days, Chaudhuri Charan Singh's sights were set on Delhi

In no election before or after this one has the poster war been more phrenetic All over Uttar Pradesh, from the cities to the little towns and villages, the walls were pasted with colourful posters, most of them printed on offset machines Huge posters depicting the numerous schemes launched by the Congress Government and the numerous foundation-stones laid in the state—a gimmick which had been used brazenly by that dynamic politician Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna, whom Indira Gandhi had sent to UP to win the elections for her—and big posters telling you to "give victory to the Congress and lift Uttar Pradesh " Juxtaposed everywhere was the Jana Sangh counterpoint—An emaciated old villager saying, "For 26 years I have waited in vain—but now *Jana Sangh* " *Next to every beaming face of Indira Gandhi, one had the* dramatic posters of Atal Behari Vajpayee with an upraised fisted hand Ran the message —"*Uttar Pradesh ki sarkar Atalji ke sabal hathon men*" (the Government of U P in the strong hands of Atal Behari Vajpayee)

[8]*The Statesman*, 11 February 1973

Scrawled in between were the BKD catchwords—"Bring Charan Singh" A regular cacophony all around

From the soaring heights of their campaign, the Opposition parties crashed to the depths of despair With a miserable 32 per cent votes, *the Congress romped home The election* had once again dramatically shown the futility of a splintered Opposition trying to oust the Congress juggernaut

Though a united Opposition party still remained as elusive as before, the 1974 results once again compelled the leaders to think in that direction What was more significant, some of the opposition leaders, specially of the Jana Sangh, were driven to the conclusion that they could not trounce Indira Gandhi by themselves They had to hitch their wagon to a star They started looking around

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JP was already reappearing on the horizon The death of Prabhavati, his dear wife, at a time when movements in Gujarat and Bihar were already stirring the people, specially the young, lured him back once again into the kind of politics he liked—"the deeper and wider kind of politics"[1] In December 1973, he had published some correspondence he had been carrying on with Indira Gandhi earlier that year It ended with JP expressing "a sense of utter disappointment and distress" at the *lack of response from the lady in Delhi He followed* this up by publishing an Open Letter to the Members of Parliament This was published in his new journal, *Everyman's*, which he had launched just about that time—an indication of how his restless mind was working

It was time for a change, JP was convinced by the beginning of 1974 "There is another 1942 movement in sight to change the course of history," he said on 3 February 1974 Though many would not accept the parallel between the 1942 movement and the happenings in Bihar and Gujarat in 1974, JP had certainly sensed the temper of the youth—a force in which he had an immense faith

He had played almost no role in the Gujarat upheaval, and had even had a feeling of being left out Even so, he had gone to Gujarat to see things for himself The visit had reinforced his belief that it was time for a change, which to him meant not merely changing Tweedledum for Tweedledee but a much "deeper change," an all-round political,

[1]Quoted by Walter [illegible]

all his life, specially of the small-town variety. Charan Singh had no taste for JP's "woolly thinking" He just could not understand JP when he talked of ushering in basic changes in the existing order without political involvement JP's talk about "total revolution," he thought, was total bunkum

He would perhaps have taken a different view, if he had seen anything worthwhile for himself in JP's scheme of things At one of his party conclaves at Lucknow, Charan Singh said that he could co-operate with the JP movement "if it did not adversely affect the interest of the party" Those who knew Charan Singh and his politics could interpret this in only one way—he would accept the JP movement if he was promised the crown, when it was available

After the fiasco of 1974 elections, Charan Singh had started looking around once again for a stronger and bigger combination of parties With his friends, Biju Patnaik and Balraj Madhok, he began negotiating for a new party Piloo Mody was in Gujarat when he learnt that Charan Singh, Biju Patnaik, and others had gathered in Delhi He rushed back to join the discussions, and it was tentatively decided that they would try and bring about a merger Out of it grew the BLD—a combination of the BKD, the SSP, the Swatantra, the Utkal Congress, and three other small splinter groups The new party was by no means a national alternative to the Congress Its influence was, by and large, limited to areas in UP, Bihar, Orissa, and Haryana Like the BKD, it continued to remain a personality-based party Though formally launched on 29 August 1974, even party members had not been enrolled when the Emergency was declared All its committees had remained *ad hoc*

In the Gujarat elections of May 1975, all that the Opposition parties could agree to was a *morcha* By going on fast, which had forced Indira Gandhi to order elections in Gujarat, Morarji Desai had grown taller by a few inches He had gained a new voice of authority JP had been kept out of the Gujarat poll-negotiations, and he felt so cut up about it that he only made a fleeting visit to Ahmedabad towards the end of the campaign There, for the first time, he came out with a "one party" idea, instead of *morchas* and fronts

The election results from Gujarat started coming the same day as the traumatic Allahabad High Court judgement A new hope surged in the hearts of the Opposition leaders While their campaign to force Indira Gandhi to resign mounted, the national executives of the four major Opposition parties—the BLD, the Congress (O), the Jana Sangh, and the Socialist Party—met jointly for several days at the YMCA, New

Delhi Charan Singh came out with a strong plea for a new party His mind was working on many fronts He had also criticized the proposed dharna by the Opposition leaders and, in a broadcast on the AIR, he said Indira Gandhi was not legally bound to resign He has been a great one at keeping his options open

No other Opposition party agreed to Charan Singh's plea Morarji Desai said he was in favour of a Gujarat-type *morcha* The Jana Sangh would not dissolve itself At best, it could join in a federal structure George Fernandes, the firebrand trade union leader and President of the Socialist Party, said with finality—"Ideologies cannot merge"

A few days later, the lady struck

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"My world lies in a shambles all around me," wrote JP in his *Prison Diary* on 21 July 1975 All his calculations had gone wrong Till the last, he had had illusions about Indira Gandhi He had thought better of her than she had turned out If only he had known, he would have acted differently In an interview to a journal published in England,[10] JP said,

That democracy in the country can so easily be converted into dictatorship, I could never have imagined If I could visualize that, and if I had seen this danger, I would have certainly tried to lead the movement with much more thought, given more attention to finding another way I think I would have concentrated more on political action and democratic action rather than direct action I would not have joined a party myself, but would have paid more attention to elections and preparing for them—to gather together the Opposition parties, to see that only one candidate from the Opposition parties stood in any constituency In short, I would have paid more attention to this sort of politics, put more emphasis on it ."

A victory for Charan Singh's line?

Charan Singh was at it even in the jail He presided over meetings of detenus of various political parties, and in the common travail of prison life, there seemed greater unanimity of views on the need for a one-party Opposition But within months, secret efforts had also begun for a reconciliation with Indira Gandhi Asoka Mehta, H M Patel, and several other Opposition leaders had started writing obsequious letters to the Prime Minister Everybody seemed a little surprised when Charan

Singh was suddenly released in March 1976 Very few knew then that Biju Patnaik had been in touch with his [illegible] the Prime M[illegible] Minister [illegible] on parole, [illegible] and, if pos[illegible] [illegible]ment's side

Soon after his release, Charan Singh delivered a marathon speech against the Emergency in the UP Vidhan Sabha But he also called a meeting of the BLD National Executive which decided to "educate public opinion and dissociate itself from the Lok Sangharsha Samiti"

Within months in jail, Jayaprakash Narayan could see that "the rats had begun to leave the sinking ship"[11] But he had not given up hope

In Bombay on 26 May 1976, Jayaprakash announced a new national party comprising the BLD, the Congress (O), the Jana Sangh, and the Socialist Party It was declared that the new party would be formally launched at a conference of Opposition parties in Bombay in the last week of June 1976

The announcement was obviously meant more as a psychological pressure on the Opposition parties to merge It had been put to JP by S M Joshi and others, that if he once announced a new party, it would become difficult for the Opposition leaders to wriggle out of it After all, would they go against the last wish of JP? Confronted with a *fait accompli*, they would not be able to say [illegible]

Obvious[illegible] Singh was the fi[illegible] [illegible] going to be yet anc[illegible] [illegible] A meeting of the BLD National Executive was called on 30 May 1976, to discuss JP's announcement It passed a resolution which said that while welcoming JP's idea, the BLD Executive Committee could not but express "concern at the manner in which the new party has been sought to be established"

It so happened that the news had leaked out from sources close to JP, perhaps inadvertently, that the man tipped to be the Chairman of the proposed new party was S M Joshi, the Socialist leader, and that Charan Singh's name did not figure anywhere

Charan Singh had met JP only a few days before the latter declared a new party, and had returned in anger He sent off a letter to JP—"I remember your remark made on 22 May 1976, during our talks You had said that I was so much interested in the formation of a new party

[11] JP, *Prison Diary*, 12 September 1975

because I wanted to become its leader" To his signature, he had added—"With a heavy heart"

Provoked by JP's "unilateral announcement," the BLD now took the position that first of all a policy statement of the new party should be agreed to by the four parties, and secondly, the dissolution of the existing parties must precede the inauguration of the new party Either of the two conditions was enough to scuttle the merger move

It got scuttled Again, on 8 July 1976, a meeting of the four Opposition parties was held in Delhi Here, Charan Singh raised the question of the RSS It was his firm belief, he said, that no RSS volunteers must join the new party, and no member of the new party must have anything to do with the RSS That would amount to 'double membership" which could not be permitted

On 8 October 1976, the BLD and the Congress (O) President, Asoka Mehta, came to a compromise The two were to merge and form the "Janata Congress," retaining the constitution of the Congress (O), but with Chaudhuri Charan Singh as the party Chairman But Asoka Mehta's move was strongly opposed by C B Gupta and P C Sen of West Bengal Next month, there was again some exchange of letters between the BLD leaders and Asoka Mehta The Congress (O) now took the position that it could not dissolve itself to form a new party It was a party with a long history and tradition behind it, and had huge property and assets all over the country The Congress (O) could not afford to lose all that Wouldn't it be easier for the BLD to dissolve itself, and merge with the Congress (O)? What a proposition to make to Chaudhuri Charan Singh!

Disgusted with it all, Jayaprakash Narayan told some of the Opposition leaders on 14 November 1976, "I wash my hands clean of merger"

It was incidentally reported to the National Executive of the BLD that the Jana Sangh leader, O P Tyagi, had told JP's Secretary, Sachchidanand, that his party would never accept Charan Singh as the leader of the new party

By this time, *Indira Gandhi had already been approached by Charan* Singh's two emissaries, Brahma Dutt and Satpal Malik Dutt, a short-statured man from Dehra Dun, was a former Royist turned Socialist, and then switched over to the BKD and the BLD For a while, he had worked in Charan Singh's journal *Nav Kranti*, and was picked up by the party boss to be a member of the BLD National Working Committee He had also become the Opposition leader in the UP Legislative Coun-

had come to Charan Singh via the Samajvadi Yuvjan Sabha He had been the President of the Meerut University Students' Union, and had fought and won the UP Assembly elections in 1974 on the BKD ticket Charan Singh had given him the Bagpat constituency, adjacent to his own, Chaprauli Fanatically loyal to his leader, the young man had immediately become the all-India Secretary of the party

When the Emergency was declared, Satpal Malik went underground, and had several meetings with the Jana Sangh leader, Nanaji Deshmukh, who was also in the hiding Malik was eager to discuss and plan out some course of action But when he met Nanaji in a Daryaganj house, he got the impression that the Jana Sangh leader was only worried about the welfare of the RSS, and it was from that day that Malik became dead set against any truck with the Jana Sangh

In November 1975, the young man courted arrest by offering satyagraha at Garh Mukteshwar near Meerut He was packed off to the Fatehgarh Jail, where his anti Sangh and anti RSS feeling grew even more intense He found there that the RSS men would not even have their food with others

One night, under the pillow of a RSS prisoner, Malik found some letters written by the RSS Chief Balasaheb Deoras to Indira Gandhi, offering her the co-operation of his disciplined militia Subsequently, Malik was transferred to the Tihar Jail, allegedly at the instance of Om Mehta, in order to gauge the mind of Charan Singh lodged there

At Tihar, Satpal Malik gave Deoras' letters to Charan Singh He also discussed with his leader the possibility of a settlement with Indira Gandhi Malik was released on parole, and so was Brahma Dutt, who was in another jail

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Om Mehta arranged an audience with the Prime Minister for the two emissaries of Charan Singh They met on 4 November 1976 The two got the impression that Indira Gandhi was anxious to legitimize her position, and she would be happy to have Charan Singh on her side Malik and Dutt had told her that it was time she and Charan Singh combined, and her reply was—"*Wahi hamesha haath peeche karte hain*" (It's he—Charan Singh—who always pulls back his hand)

Talking about the possibility of the BLD merging with the Congress, the emissaries proposed that she should offer the second position in the cabinet to Chaudhuri Saheb If he was given that and the Home port-

folio, everything would turn out fine Charan Singh himself was a strong votary of discipline, they argued Hadn't he asked JP to withdraw his movement? Hadn't he always rejected JP's agitational style?

Indira Gandhi heard the emissaries, but remained non-committal Just a month later, Biju Patnaik arranged a meeting between Charan Singh and the two Indira men, Mohammad Yunus and Om Mehta The whole purpose of the now famous "My dear Om" letter of Biju Patnaik, according to those who were actively associated with the negotiations at every stage, was to bring about a Charan Singh-Indira axis

On 8 January 1977, barely ten days before the Lok Sabha polls were announced, Charan Singh wrote a long letter to Indira Gandhi, telling her how faithful he had been to her, and how badly she had misunderstood him for no fault of his

"You will remember," he wrote, "that you were scheduled to preside over the annual session of the Indian Science Congress in Varanasi on 3 January 1968 The local unit of the SSP, which was a powerful organization at the time, decided to take you in custody, and produce you before a people's court for trial They announced their intention through a public meeting as also press statements Though the SSP was a constituent unit of my government, and had a strength of 45 members in the Assembly, and though I was the head of a non-Congress Government, I took personal interest in the arrangements made for your visit, and accompanied you to Varanasi Under my orders, Shri Raj Narain, MP, and other prominent workers and legislators of the SSP were put behind the bars, and a massive demonstration against you trying to reach the *pandal* where you were addressing the Science Congress, was broken up by the police

"The SSP was furious I knew the consequences of my conduct from the start, and resigned on 17 February—a day before the Assembly was scheduled to meet While I had to resign from the Congress at the time I did, owing to a failure on your part to do the right thing or get the right thing done, I had to resign from the office of Chief Minister for doing the right thing for you "

Balasaheb Deoras, the RSS demi-god, was not the only one who was extending his hand of co-operation to Indira Gandhi!

In November 1975, JP had been carried to the Jaslok Hospital He was a dying man His kidneys had stopped f[illegible]

how long he would last JP was anxious to put down his stand on the Emergency clearly and unequivocally, so that nobody could misrepresent his views when he was gone It was his concern for his place in history, something that always mattered much to him

His friend, Minoo Masani, drew up the draft of the "Last Will " The eminent Bombay lawyer, Soli Sorabjee, turned up with a Notary Public, his clerk, his register, and his seal, and the document was formalized "Just in case I am removed from the scene," said the Will, dated 5 December 1975, "I would like to state for the information of my friends in India and abroad, and the Indian people in general, that my views about the situation in India are precisely what they were on 25 June 1975, and when I wrote to the Prime Minister in July 1975 Indeed, all the ugly things that have happened since have only confirmed my apprehensions I hope the people of India will be able before long to liberate themselves non-violently from the present tyranny "

JP was to live to see his hope come true, his world put together again

He arrived in Delhi on 23 March 1977, for the making of the Janata Prime Minister It was just two months to the day since he had presided over the launching of the Janata Party But in those two months, the political scene in the country had undergone a complete metamorphosis

With bated breath, they waited for the man who had started it all, the sick and feeble old man who had turned back from death's door He had no position still and, yet suddenly, he had more power perhaps than that imperial lady of Delhi who had made and unmade Ministers *and Chief Ministers by the mere puckering of her handsome brows* JP truly had the aura of a *Loknayak* that day Whom will he make the Prime Minister was the question everybody seemed to be asking one another, as the old man was brought down the airlines ramp on his wheel-chair

It was not an easy choice, even for JP One remembered a long conversation one had had with him when he was still in the midst of his movement in Bihar Travelling by road from his Kadamkuan residence in Patna to a far off mufussil town, stopped by cheering crowds every mile or two, JP had talked of one thing and another, and finally come to the question as to who would be the next Prime Minister It had then seemed an irrelevant question But not to JP, who was already looking ahead He had suddenly gone tense Haltingly, he said, "So many people who would stake their claim for Prime Ministership there would be Morarjibhai, there would be Charan Singh there would be Vajpayee I don't know what the shape of things will be I am afraid even to

dream of it . " JP's fears were justified

At that time, Jagjivan Ram was obviously nowhere in the picture He was on the other side But even without him, it hadn't looked as though it would be an easy choice to make

And now, that the moment of decision had suddenly come, it looked even more difficult The waiting crowd went on speculating Jagjivan Ram was going to be JP's choice, some said It was, after all, Ram who had made such a victory possible But a young man, who had been a close associate of the Sarvodaya leader, said, "JP is for Morarji Desai" Somebody asked why, and he retorted, "Why not? Who has been in the jail for 19 months? Morarji or Babuji? Who has a cleaner image?"

JP was believed to have great regard for Jagjivan Ram They had been in the Hazaribagh Jail together in 1942 And during the Bihar movement, he was considered one Congress stalwart with an undercurrent of sympathy for JP's struggle Though he had made public speeches criticizing the movement, obviously to please his boss, Indira Gandhi, he had never attacked Jayaprakash Narayan, as many others had done But then he had gone along with the Emergency, and at one point, JP wrote in his *Prison Diary*—"The *Tribune* has a three-column headlined speech of Mr Jagjivan Ram, asserting with great force, 'P M 's Leadership Vital For Executing 20-Point Plan' I wonder why this loud declaration of loyalty Is there a hidden reason behind it, or is it just a periodical reaffirmation of loyalty? It is incredible that such sycophancy should be so loudly exhibited even by a man like Jagjivan Babu What a degeneration!"

Ram was now a serious contender Ever since 2 February 1977, when he quit the Congress, all attention had got focused on 6 Krishna Menon Marg, his residence The Media, it seemed, even forgot the existence of Morarji's 5 Dupleix Road The daily 4 o'clock Press conference of Jagjivan Ram had become an essential part of the routine of newsmen from all the world over After that traumatic Sunday—"Beautiful Sunday, We Are Free" was a record played twice on the AIR Listener's Choice programme that evening—it was almost like a Prime Minister's Press conference at 6 Krishna Menon Marg Ram had made it seem that way Two afternoons in running, he had lost his temper on a foreign correspondent who wanted the answer to a simple question—Would he stake his claim for the Prime Ministership? On the third day—hats off to the doggedness of the correspondent—Ram gave the answer, "I have never shirked any responsibility in my life which the country wanted me to shoulder" One could see from the atmosphere around that

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his supporters were taking it for granted that Jagjivan Ram would be asked to shoulder the responsibility And, of course, he was all set to take it

Nobody questioned the great role that Jagjivan Ram and his associates in the Congress for Democracy had played in the historic victory His time-bomb had thrown the Congress off its rocker What was more, it had brought about a qualitative change in the country's mood and atmosphere 'Democracy is back with a bang," wrote Martin Woollacott in the *Guardian*, the day after the ' explosion " At one go, people's fear had gone There was a sudden upsurge of emotions, the like of which the country had not seen since Independence With them, Ram and H N Bahuguna had brought to their side, not only the Harijans but also the Muslims, the two chunks of the electorate which had been the sheet anchor of Congress victories in the past The death of President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed was another jolt for the Congress Nobody could sum up Indira Gandhi's predicament better than a Calcutta voter With Ahmed's passing away, he said, Indira Gandhi has lost ' both Ram and Rahim "[11]

Ram's big contribution was acknowledged by all, but nobody has thought yet of the price he and his men would demand The Congress knew the Achilles' heel of the Opposition All through the campaign, it had goaded the Opposition leaders to declare who their leader would be Cleverly, the Opposition evaded the issue all through But now they could evade it no longer

Soon after the final results had come in, the spokesmen of the Janata Party told reporters, that the ball was really in the court of the Congress for Democracy They had first to decide to merge with the Janata Party, before they went in to choose their leader together Both the Janata and the CFD had fought the elections under one flag, with a common symbol, and the country at large expected them to go hand in hand The Janata spokesmen were guarded in their comments on the attitude of the CFD, which was gradually coming into the open, but they could afford to speak from a position of strength The Janata Party had got a clear majority on its own, and could form a government even without the CFD which, of course, it did not want to Because this would have affected the credibility of the new government

With the arrival of JP, the scene shifted to the little bungalow at the Gandhi Peace Foundation complex, the same place from which he had

[11] M J Akbar in *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 11 February 1977

been picked up that dark morning of 26 June 1975 Before going to meet JP that evening, Jagjivan Ram had sent him a letter saying that ' in terms of the talks between the two parties," he was agreeing to the merger of the CFD with the Janata Party Until that time, Ram was pretty sure that he would become the Prime Minister

If the choice had been left to the newly elected MPs of the Janata and the CFD, Ram might well have got a majority The group-wise break-up of the 302 MPs (including three Independents who had joined the Janata) was roughly this way—Jana Sangh—93, BLD—71, Con gress (O)—51, Socialists—28, Chandra Shekhar group—6, CFD—28, Unattached or regional parties—25 The BLD, again, was not a solid chunk Of its strength of 71, about 26 were followers of Raj Narain, about 14 of Biju Patnaik, and the rest were men who owed absolute allegiance to Chaudhuri Charan Singh

Charan Singh had been assured by the Jana Sangh leaders that he would be "made Indira Gandhi " He had felt, that more than any other constituent of the Janata Party, it was the Jana Sangh which could be of greatest use to him If he could keep the Jana Sangh on the right side, he would be assured of the crown But he could see that his lieutenants, Satpal Malik and Brahma Dutt, no matter how loyal to him, would be irritants in his relations with the Jana Sangh It was Malik who had rifled the incriminating jail letters of Deoras, and the RSS could never forgive him for that Moreover, they had been Charan Singh's emissaries to Indira Gandhi, and had witnessed most of the clandestine parleys between the two sides In short, they knew too much, and could easily jeopardize his relations with the Jana Sangh Some of the people in Charan Singh's court told him that the two men might begin telling tales which could damage him It would be wiser to take action against them before they could do any mischief Charan Singh had promptly suspended them from the BLD This, he had thought, would appease the Jana Sangh, and make them forget his earlier onslaughts against them

But when the chips were down, Charan Singh was left high and dry Nobody even proposed his name for the Prime Ministership

The Jana Sangh had gone over to Jagjivan Ram The only exceptions, in the event of an election, could have been Kanwarlal Gupta, and one or two others The rest were for Ram Their reason was that the election of a Harijan as the Prime Minister would have given the Janata Party a "bright new image " Besides, since Ram's CFD had a large following of minorities and so-called progressive elements, his leader-

ship would have helped consolidate the support of these sections to the party as a whole If the Jana Sangh was behind Ram, it could become more acceptable to the Muslims and the Harijans There were critics of the Jana Sangh who saw quite another reason for its wanting to support Ram A Prime Minister, who did not have a large number behind him, would be easier to control But the 28 CFD members were not the only supporters of Ram The Socialists and the Chandra Shekhar group were also with him

The supporters of Morarji Desai could see what an election might lead to The master-minds on this side were the Sarvodaya leaders and the old political manipulator from Uttar Pradesh, Chandra Bhanu Gupta Helping Gupta was his old-time protege and drum beater, Raj Narain He was still to become Charan Singh's "Hanuman" Knowing Raj Narain inside out, C B Gupta kept a close watch on his movements right till the end of the drama

Soon after the Lok Sabha results were clear, the Sarvodaya conclave had met to decide its strategy Out of the power game, and yet, in it, like JP himself, the Sarvodaya people did not want to be on the wrong side They wanted to know JP's mind, so that they could back the right horse Siddhraj Dhadda, President of the Sarva Seva Sangh had rushed to Patna, and had returned with the news that JP was for Morarji Desai This important bit of information had been conveyed quietly to Desai, not because JP wanted it to be conveyed to him but because of the natural tendency on the part of some people to ingratiate themselves with the rising star

The other side was not entirely unaware of JP's mind, which explained the insistence of Ram and Bahuguna to let the choice be made in a normal democratic way But they were told that an election, at this stage, could create unnecessary strains in the party, and this would amount to projecting a very bad image before the people who had given them such a massive mandate Ram and Bahuguna finally agreed to a *via media* —a consensus, in the usual Congress style Let JP meet the MPs one by one, ascertain their views, and then declare the "unanimous result" JP agreed to this, much to the chagrin of Sarvodaya leaders around, but had no position to butt in All they could do at that moment was to induct J B Kripalani into the consensus process A whispered suggestion to JP had done it He readily suggested that it would be a very good idea Kripalani helped him in taking the consensus This was not relished on the side of Ram, but it could think of no objection it could raise And so late in the evening of 23 March 1977, Secretary of the

Gandhi Peace Foundation, Radhakrishna, announced to newsmen on behalf of JP, the process that would be followed next morning The two old men, JP and JB, would sit at two separate tables, and the MPs would file past them one by one, giving them their choice on a little chit of paper

The supporters of Morarji knew they had lost the battle It would merely be a farce next morning, the outcome was already clear They knew that both JP and JB were for Morarji Desai, but they could do very little The procedure had reduced them to mere clerks The Sarvodaya men felt deeply disturbed, but they did not know what to do about it Late in the night, when the crowds had cleared, four Sarvodaya men—Radhakrishna, Siddhraj Dhadda, Narayan Desai, and Govind Rao Deshpande—went and sat on the lawns of the Gandhi Peace Foundation It was all very unfair, they agreed JP would be declaring the name, and it would be passed off by everybody as JP's choice, even though it did not reflect his opinion It was not fair to bind him like this, they said It was time to do something

One of them phoned Chandra Shekhar, but was told he was at Jagjivan Ram's house It was 11 in the night, but the four restless men decided this was not a night to sleep They drove to Ram's house A big meeting was going on inside All the supporters of Ram seemed to be there George Fernandes, Nandini Satpathy and, of course, H N Bahuguna, busy as a beaver The visitors sent word to Chandra Shekhar He was one of the closest men to JP, but he was no admirer of Morarji Desai, and he did not see anything wrong in the procedure that had been adopted

The four of them drove on to Morarji Desai's place, and from there to L K Advani, who told them that the Jana Sangh group was supporting Jagjivan Ram because they had been told that was JP's view Radhakrishna told him, that on the contrary, JP was all for Morarji Desai

"Why didn't you tell me earlier?" asked Advani, surprised His party had taken a decision a day before, and it would be very difficult to do anything now But, he suggested, they would talk it over when they met at the Rajghat for the pledge-taking ceremony next morning

It was nearly 2 30 in the night when they returned to the Gandhi Peace Foundation. At 5 in the morning they were out again Radhakrishna and Narayan Desai went to Morarji, and Govind Rao and Siddhraj Dhadda to Nanaji Deshmukh

"Do you know what is happening?" Radhakrishna asked Morarji

The two of them told Morarji, that if the consensus procedure was followed, he would lose But Morarji didn't agree with their calculation He was in his own "make-believe world," felt Radhakrishna "When we explained the situation to Morarji, he referred it to God, as usual "[13]

From Morarji's house, the two went to Biju Patnaik, for they thought they would get the Charan Singh angle there Charan Singh lay in the Wellingdon Hospital with a urinary infection, but Patnaik and other BLD leaders had been in touch with him Patnaik told Radhakrishna and Narayan Desai that Charan Singh had threatened to withdraw from the Janata, if Jagjivan Ram became the leader He was writing a letter to JP, Patnaik said

The two men returned to the Gandhi Peace Foundation, and talked to JP What did he really want, they asked him JP said he was very clear in his mind that Desai should be the Prime Minister Of course, he wanted that Jagjivan Ram and Charan Singh should also be in the cabinet

What was the point then in going through the farce of consensus? Why should he strain himself unnecessarily? The two men succeeded in convincing JP that it would be a meaningless exercise "Talk to the others," JP told them

At Rajghat, they talked to Atal Behari Vajpayee He said he had no idea that JP was for Morarji Desai If that was so, the Jana Sangh would go along with him Earlier, Nanaji Deshmukh had also agreed that there was no question of going against the wishes of Jayaprakash Narayan The Jana Sangh group was not willing to create any crisis, it had decided to take the path of least resistance

Back at the Gandhi Peace Foundation, the crowd of MPs was getting restive The time fixed for the formal election of the leader in the Central Hall of Parliament was 12 noon Suspense was mounting

Around 9 A M J B Kripalani arrived, and was told by Radhakrishna and others that it had been decided to drop the procedure fixed in the night Though Kripalani agreed with the objective, his political shrewdness, ripened over the years, told him that a unilateral decision on their part to drop the procedure would open them to much criticism If the procedure has to be changed, let the MPs themselves change it, he said It was a convincing, practical advice

C B Gupta and Raj Narain had by then played their trump-card

[13]A follower of Charan Singh in an interview with the author

Wily Gupta had sent off Raj Narain to the Wellingdon Hospital to work on Charan Singh "Jagjivan Babu is going to become the Prime Minister," Raj Narain announced to the sick man His eyebrows became knitted with distaste Charan Singh's aversion to Ram was no secret Raj Narain dropped another brick "Babuji, of course, will be the Prime Minister in name only," he went on ironically "The real Prime Minister will be your friend Bahuguna "[14]

That did it Charan Singh could stand anyone but H N Bahuguna, one of his biggest foes in UP politics "I would prefer to go back to jail than work under these people," he fumed

Raj Narain was ready with the solution "You better convey your feelings to Jayaprakashji fast, or it would be too late," he said

Charan Singh wrote a four line letter to JP saying that he could not work under the Prime Ministership of Jagjivan Ram, but he was willing to withdraw from the race in favour of Morarji Desai

Raj Narain rushed out with the letter, followed by his bunch of young cronies, as shaggy as himself He had left some behind at the Gandhi Peace Foundation to poison the air against Jagjivan Ram "*Chamar kaise Prime Minister banega?*" (How can a cobbler become the Prime Minister?), they went about saying angrily "*Kal tak hame jail men band kiya aur aaj Prime Minister banega!*" (Till yesterday he clapped us in jails, and today, he wants to be the Prime Minister!)

Morarji Desai was talking to a couple of correspondents at 5 Dupleix Road, when some young people brought him a piece of paper "It's a letter Chaudhuri Saheb has written to Jayaprakashji," one of them told Desai It was obviously the same letter that Raj Narain had got him to write Charan Singh had written it to JP, and there was no need to have taken it to Morarji Desai, but then Raj Narain did not want to lose this opportunity of showing his firm loyalty to Morarji With an air of cold aloofness, Morarji read the letter, but those present could not miss the urgency in his words as he told the visitors, "Take it to Jayaprakashji right away" Then he went on with his interview Inevitably, they were talking about the Prime Ministership, and Morarji remarked that he couldn't even think of a "corrupt man" becoming the Prime Minister He even named the person, not bothering about the tape that was on He himself projected an Olympian detachment to the job which was going to be his in a few hours from then "I am not one of those who believes in manoeuvres," he said, running his hand on his close-cropped hair

Back at the Gandhi Peace Foundation, the MPs had gathered to

register their choice Most of them did not know yet that the consensus move had already been dropped Jagjivan Ram himself was at Radhakrishna's bungalow, unaware of the developments The moment Raj Narain returned with the letter, C B Gupta converted the crowd into an informal meeting, with himself in the chair With aplomb, Raj Narain got up to read Charan Singh's letter Having dropped the bomb, he proposed that instead of the unnecessary process of "consensus-taking," the two leaders, JP and Kripalani, should be authorized to name the leader The resolution was promptly seconded, but several members shot up in protest The most vehement of them all was Ram Dhan, a close friend of Chandra Shekhar But now, they could only fret and fume Jagjivan Ram got wind of the new development, and quietly drove away

By the time the members gathered in the Central Hall of Parliament, the crisis had burst out into the open A beaming Morarji, straight and prim, sat below the podium in the glare of arc-lights and flashing bulbs No sign of Jagjivan Ram Nor of H N Bahuguna Some CFD members in the hall were quietly called away, one by one Acharya Kripalani walked in, followed by JP in a wheel chair JP was too frail and excited to talk, so it was left to the other old dissenter to announce Morarji's name Even before the cheers had died down, Kripalani added ruefully, "The Constitution does not provide for two Prime Ministers!"

Morarji had, at last, made it and, for once, he decided that he could show a little emotion "Usually I don't feel very emotional," he said "But this time I am overwhelmed because of the burden I will bear" In his brief remark, JP warned that he would feel free to attack the government when necessary, but Desai, at once, promised he would "act according to your advice" JP was overcome He removed his glasses to wipe his tears Here, at last, was a Prime Minister promising to go by his advice He had lived to see the end of the Nehru era In what looked like a touching farewell to his long career, he said, "I am sick, and may not live long, but I am happy I will go with this great assurance"

"You should go and see Babuji," Dada Kripalani whispered to Morarji, at the end of the ritual "Why should I go to him?" was Desai's blunt answer

Ram's camp was in turmoil The "revolution" had turned sour Temper raged inside and outside 6 Krishna Menon Marg Harijan crowds tore Janata Party flags, and trampled them under their feet

Flaying his servants with curses, Jagjivan Ram stormed from room to room kicking furniture and shouting, "Betrayal!" Janata Party leaders rushed to the house to mollify him, and some of them told him that JP had promised him any portfolio that he liked "Who is Jayaprakash Narayan to offer me anything?" ranted Ram

After four days of lurid drama, Jagjivan Ram was ready to take anything Desai had to offer All he needed was a face-saver, and this was readily got from JP "Without your co-operation, the building of a new India will not be possible," came a telephonic message from Patna

And so they set out to "build a new India!"

11

Morarji Desai—Always Right

"THIS MAN does not wear khadi," came a raucous complaint "He has only bought these khadi clothes to come here"

Morarji Desai glared at the young man standing before him, and commanded, "Show me your vest"

The man hesitated, but he could see that the command was meant He went forward Desai turned the man's shirt collar and peered below He wore a mill-woven vest That was the end of the young man's chances as far as Desai was concerned He moved on to the next applicant

That was way back in November 1956 Morarji Desai had been sent to Patna as the Congress observer for the selection of candidates for the general elections of 1957 Deeply conscientious, Morarji was determined to select "the best men and women without being influenced in any way" And he made a thorough screening job of it

Before he left Patna, Desai was approached by a charming young lady "Would you give any advice to Congressmen in Bihar, Morarjibhai?" she asked him respectfully The Congress in the state was deeply riven with rivalry between the two caste chieftains, Dr Srikrishna Sinha and Dr Anugrah Narain Sinha, and the lady thought Desai would have something to say to the partymen There was a certain awe about Morarji in those days He had been the strong man of Bombay, and had earned the reputation of being a straight and upright man Jawaharlal Nehru had just brought him over to Delhi where he was soon to join as a Union Minister

Desai looked hard at the lady She was the very picture of glamour Bobbed hair, sparkling bangles, polished nails She wore khadi all

right, but her sari had gorgeous *jari* work He knew she was Tarkeshwari Sinha, MP from Bihar, described by many as the "glamour girl of Parliament"

"You wear very expensive clothes," Desai said disapprovingly, and delivered a stern little homily on the need for simple living and austerity in life It was not right for women in the Congress to dress like that It wasn't good to be ostentatious

When Desai passed a remark on her bangles, Tarkeshwari Sinha remonstrated "This is the custom in Bihar It is considered bad form for married women not to wear bangles" But this brought forth another sermon from Desai

It had sounded very prudish to Tarkeshwari, a progressive lady not used to interference in her personal life-style Desai had no business to talk about her sari and bangles, she thought, no matter how prim and proper he may be She sent off a letter that very day to Jawaharlal Nehru, protesting against the personal remarks made by Desai, and wondering why the Congress Parliamentary Board could not send more rational observers to the states Nehru passed the letter on, with his remarks, to the then Congress President, U N Dhebar

The Press, too, had picked up little stories about the crotchety Congress observer The incident at the Sadaquat Ashram, headquarters of the Bihar Congress, about Desai examining the vest of an applicant had been published as a box-item in one of the Patna dailies, and the story had travelled to Delhi

"Hey, Tarkeshwari," the fun-loving Feroze Gandhi called out to her in the Central Hall of Parliament, the moment he saw her after return from Patna "Tell us, didn't Morarji examine the petticoats of the women candidates?" he asked, much to the amusement of all his chums Tarkeshwari protested hard, but who cared? For days, the Central Hall was alive with the sound of laughter over the vest-and-petticoat joke

Eventually, it got to Morarji Desai Anger would have been the normal reaction. But since anger is one of the many emotions he claims to have conquered, he could not have been angry He did not forget it, though

After Desai was made the Union Finance Minister in March 1958, Nehru called Tarkeshwari Sinha and told her he wanted to make her a Deputy Minister, and place her under Morarji Desai She told Nehru that in view of the unhappy encounter between them it would

be awkward for her as well as for Desai if she was put under him But Nehru persisted, perhaps just for the fun of binding a glamour girl to a high-nosed puritan

Tarkeshwari went to see Desai "Nehruji wants me to be your Deputy Minister," she told him 'But as there has been tension between us, I told him it might be awkward for you Since he insisted, I have come to you If you have any reservations about me "

"Why did you tell people that I examined the petticoats of women candidates in Patna?" asked Desai

"I certainly did not say that to anyone In fact, I protested strongly when some people started this joke"

"But you wrote a letter to Nehruji against me" Morarji had been shown the letter by U N Dhebar

"Yes, I did I had felt angry about your personal remarks," she said

"You had asked my advice, and I had given it If you didn't like it, you should have told me instead of writing to others"

She told him she didn't like people interfering with what she wore, and how she lived These were personal matters, and she wanted to be free to choose her own way If he had any reservations about her being his Deputy Minister, he must tell her

"I have no reservations," Morarji told her calmly 'You are welcome to join me"

Tarkeshwari became his Deputy Minister, and they soon developed a close mutual understanding

* * *

Vindictiveness is one failing Morarji Desai would hate to be accused of, if hatred itself has any place in his mind, which he has so diligently analyzed and purged over his long years He fought so long and hard against human weaknesses that virtue itself became a fetish with him

One day, when he was the Union Minister for Commerce and Industry (November 1956-March 1958), a Bombay industrialist, the late K C Mahindra, went to meet him Mahindra had applied to the ministry for a licence to set up three industrial units, but it was not about these that they talked Mahindra also happened to be an historian, and their conversation had somehow veered round to the legendary encounter between Shivaji and Afzal Khan Mahindra

took an anti-Shivaji line which infuriated Morarji A heated exchange followed in the course of which Desai condemned Mahindra as a "stooge of Britishers" They had parted on a very strained note

That same day, Mahindra called on Manubhai Shah, who was then Morarji's Minister of State, and before discussing business, he told Shah of the altercation with Desai Later, Morarji too had talked about it to Manubhai, and spoken strongly against Mahindra

Late that night, when Morarji got down to the day's files, he found that Manubhai had forwarded him all the three files relating to Mahindra's applications He went through them agitatedly Then he rang up Manubhai

"You think I am a mean-minded person?" he asked Manubhai

For a moment, Manubhai was at a loss to understand what Morarji was driving at

"You sent all the three files of Mahindra to me, knowing that we have fought," Morarji said "You think I am mean-minded? You think I am vindictive? You must have thought that in my anger I would reject all his applications For your information, I have cleared all of them"

It was just possible that but for the day's altercation, Morarji would have found some fault with Mahindra's applications, and rejected them But it had become a challenge to him He had to prove that he did not suffer from such common human failings

It is a strange, complex-ridden mind Rigid, curt, abrasive and, above all, self-righteous "I have no doubt in my mind" was such an inseparable part of Morarji's assertive speeches that it became a joke in political and journalist circles in Gujarat and Bombay He may agree to have an argument with you, but his would always be the last word, for he never doubts the rightness of his stand, whether it is on sex or prohibition, on Goa or Sikkim, or the food one should eat

Part of this mental make-up he inherited from his ancestors who belonged to the caste of Anavil Brahmins, "known for their plain-speaking, somewhat hot tempers, and independence"[1] Part of it came from the deeply religious atmosphere of his family, and his avid reading of the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Panchatantra*—"My views about morality were formed through these books" The economic straits of his early life, and the hard jolts he got when he was a mere boy certainly contributed to the making of his personality When

[1] Morarji Desai, *The Story of My Life*, Macmillan, New Delhi, 1977

Morarji was just 15 years old, his father committed suicide by throwing himself into a well Quite apart from the psychological wrench, it suddenly left on his young shoulders the burden of a large family—his grandmother, mother, three younger brothers, two sisters, and the little girl he had been married to only three days after his father's death

Add to this, the gnawing sense of having been wronged again and again throughout his long career As a young Deputy Collector in the late twenties, he had felt wronged by his British Collector, whose report against him ultimately made him decide to quit service What made it worse was his firm belief that he had been made to suffer for being in the right Giving the background of how his conflict with the senior officer began, Morarji wrote in *The Story of My Life*, "There had been some conflict or other between this District Magistrate and myself, ever since he had taken charge at Godhra As soon as he alighted at the station, he had asked me to get his luggage to his bungalow I did so, and sent in the bill for the expenses I felt that he did not like this As I presented the bill, he paid the money Then he asked me to arrange for a she-buffalo to be kept in the compound of his bungalow to supply milk regularly Strictly, he ought not to have asked me to do such work, but he had asked me, and so I told him that if he paid the price of the buffalo, the arrangement would be possible He did not like this idea either The result was that he no longer wanted me to make this arrangement, and got it made in some other way He ordered that the expenses for cleaning the compound of the Collector's bungalow should be paid out of the contingency funds I told him that was not proper, and that he should pay the expenses He did not like this either I was his personal assistant I gave no cause for legitimate complaint, but I had the impression that he was not friendly towards me "

The sense of having been let down or conspired against is a constant refrain in Morarji's life He felt deeply hurt when Jawaharlal and Indira Gandhi decided in 1959 to split the bilingual Bombay State They had met at the residence of Govind Ballabh Pant, the then Home Minister, to discuss the issue Nehru, Indira Gandhi, and Chief Minister of the Bombay State, Y B Chavan, were all there The moment Pant initiated the discussion, Morarji intervened, "You decided to form the bigger Bombay State after the Congress Working Committee and the Central Government had previously decided to make three different states out of Bombay I agreed to your proposal then, and yet, you

He had got the unmistakable impression that the others had already come to a decision in "my absence"

"I met Jawaharlalji after this decision was taken," says Desai, "and asked him if it was proper to have got the earlier decision taken by the Congress Working Committee and the Union Government, and then to change it after having made me a scapegoat for the earlier decision and placing me in a false position in the eyes of the Maharashtrians I also asked him why he did not defend me against those attacks He very mildly replied that things had become very difficult both for himself and the country, and so he was forced to be a party to the changed decision When Nehru accepted my feelings, I told him that I was satisfied that he realized my predicament, and so I had nothing more to complain about"

But the thought continued to rankle in his mind When he met Y B Chavan later, he asked him, "When you had already discussed the matter earlier, why did you not tell me about it?" Chavan, says Morarji Desai, expressed his regret for having kept him in the dark "I therefore did not say anything more about this at that time," he adds

After the death of Govind Ballabh Pant in 1961, came the question of Deputy Leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party, and Desai had no doubt in his mind that Nehru had manoeuvred to keep him out of it Until he was in Bombay, Morarji had enjoyed the complete trust of Nehru, and had come to look upon himself as the most "confidential adviser" to the Prime Minister Even on questions like what portfolio ought to be given to Govind Ballabh Pant, Nehru had sought his advice, and Desai claimed it was he who had persuaded the Prime Minister to give the Home portfolio to Pant But gradually Nehru's attitude towards him changed Morarji had observed and analyzed the change, and had come to realize that it was "Jawaharlalji's practice not to have anybody as an adviser for more than three years"

The real block between their relations, Desai felt, was that he always stood for principles "Jawaharlalji knew that I would not approve of everything he would want me to do" The trouble, according to Desai, was that Nehru "did not believe in God and, while adhering to truth generally, he had no objection to resorting to an occasional untruth" While he gave Nehru the credit for trying to avoid being personally associated with untruth, he could see that Jawaharlal "turned a blind eye when colleagues resorted to falsehood, either of their own accord in order to please him, or at his instance I realized after co

ing to Delhi that I was not useful to him in such matters He must, therefore, have decided that I should not be made the Deputy leader"

When Desai learnt that Jagjivan Ram had been put up as a candidate, he went and protested to Nehru After the passing away of Maulana Azad and Govind Ballabh Pant, Morarji had come to be No 2 in the cabinet, and he reminded Nehru that it was the accepted convention that the No 2 man became the Deputy Leader Nehru then proposed electing two Deputy Leaders, one from the Lok Sabha, and the other from the Rajya Sabha

Desai fired back, "If you had made this proposal to Sardar Patel, he *would have resigned from the cabinet I have so far observed the rule* that I should accept a position in the party, only if I am unanimously elected to it If, therefore, there is a contest for Deputy Leadership, I will not stand for election, and I feel that I must resign from the cabinet."

Nehru told him it was difficult for him to persuade Ram not to contest Morarji was in a fix He could see that they had decided to have a contest, because they knew that Morarji would prefer to leave the race if he was not unanimously elected But he was not going to give in so easily He told Nehru that in that case he would contest the election "The general atmosphere was that I would have been elected, and Jawaharlalji changed his tactics and asked me whether I had any objection if no Minister became Deputy Leader, and one ordinary member from the Lok Sabha and another from the Rajya Sabha were elected as Deputy Leaders"

Eventually, Nehru took that decision, and Desai had no doubt in his mind that all these plans had only been meant to prevent him from becoming the Deputy Leader

Again, he had no doubt in his mind that the main purpose behind the Kamaraj Plan was to oust him from the cabinet Both the Gold Control Order and the Compulsory Deposit Scheme had been originally proposed by Nehru, Krishna Menon, and others Desai claims to have resisted in the beginning, and says it was only on great pressure from Nehru that he formulated and introduced the measures But they had turned out to be highly unpopular, and Nehru had wavered under the storm of public opinion He was all too willing to throw the measures overboard, but having once gone ahead with them, Desai stuck to his guns

By then, another consideration had started causing anxiety to Nehru —Who after him? As Desai saw it, the Kamaraj Plan was "the second

step taken by Jawaharlalji to prevent me from succeeding him, whenever such a contingency arose It soon became clear that he wanted Indiraji to succeed him This was not surprising Pandit Motilalji had requested Gandhiji to see that Jawaharlalji succeeded him as Congress President, and he was then elected to the post To show that the Kamaraj Plan was not particularly aimed at me, Lal Bahadurji was also included in the plan, but there was an understanding that he would be taken back in the cabinet after three or four months "

• • •

Desai had for long regarded himself as Nehru's logical heir Many others, too, had thought of him that way On his first trip abroad in March 1958, some of the London newspapers greeted him with headlines such as "Nehru's heir comes West," and in the USA, he was often introduced by his hosts as "India's next Prime Minister" Desai is not known to have ever protested or shown any modesty about it.

Only later, Desai realized that this sort of "propaganda" could have been one reason for the gradual coldness of Nehru towards him He wrote that though he did not like people and newspapers saying that he would succeed Nehru, "I was helpless as I could not prevent it I knew that this would create jealousies My name was mentioned as Jawaharlalji's successor even during the life-time of Maulana Saheb and Pantji, and I considered it very improper"

At least twice during the fifties, Nehru talked about retiring from Prime Ministership—which was never meant seriously—and every time, Morarji's name somehow popped up as a possible successor It happened once when he was still the Chief Minister of Bombay, and some senior journalists recall Morarji having been asked if he was going to succeed Nehru "I have not been asked yet," Morarji had replied

When Nehru died, there was obviously no doubt in Morarji's mind that he ought to be the unanimous choice But soon, there was a raging controversy, and it was conveyed to Desai by a special messenger that if he accepted Lal Bahadur Shastri as the Prime Minister, he would be made the Deputy PM

"I do not approve of making any such bargains," Desai told the messenger curtly "I do not want to give up my self-respect for any post"

D P Mishra, for long Indira Gandhi's "Chanakya" from Madhya

Pradesh, approached Desai with yet another suggestion "Propose the name of Indira Gandhi," Mishra told him This sounded preposterous to Desai, and he told him so

"But this is only a tactics," Mishra said "When you propose Indira ji for this post, Lal Bahadurji will not accept it Indiraji will not, therefore, contest the elections, and will support you Your victory will be assured"

Morarji could not understand all these tactics Politicians who have been close to him for years believe him to be incapable of intrigues and manoeuvres But Morarji could sense that there was something fishy about Mishra's suggestion Why should one proceed in such a roundabout manner?

Mishra, the shrewd tactician, reminded Morarji that even Lord Krishna had believed in such tactics and manoeuvres Steeped in the study of the Scriptures from his childhood, Desai delivered a little lecture, "Sri Krishna was God incarnate, and is known as Sampoorna Purushottam, while Rama was considered Maryada Purushottam Rama behaved as an ideal human being, and one should, therefore, act as Rama acted Sri Krishna was acting as God, and could act in any manner he liked, but ordinary men cannot imitate Him One should only do what Krishna has advised people to do in the *Gita*. I do not want to enter into any intrigue whereby, if I do not become the Prime Minister, Lal Bahadurji should not become Prime Minister either I consider Lal Bahadurji more capable and fitter than Indiraji, and I cannot, therefore, make a proposal that she be appointed Prime Minister"

It is these lectures and homilies of Desai which have always put off even his friends and supporters But over the years, he has developed such an image of himself in his own mind that he has constantly to justify and rationalize himself to himself Strait is the gate for him

The manoeuvrers got the better of Desai Though he himself dissented, the Congress Working Committee decided that the Congress President, Kamaraj, should take the consensus of the MPs "Shri Kamaraj," says Desai, "took the opinion of the members according to his own particular method and, seeing me one day, told me that the consensus was in favour of Lal Bahadurji I replied to him that I had no trust in his consensus, but he could do whatever he wanted to"

If there had been an election, Desai thought, both he and Shastri stood an equal chance of victory Many others thought Desai would

have been defeated In any case, Desai chose not to contest "If I was elected in such circumstances," he later rationalized, "it would have been very difficult for me to do my work, and all my time and energy would have to be spent in meeting opponents or a situation might arise when I would have to resign out of sheer disgust'

No such fears could keep him from plunging into a contest against Indira Gandhi after Shastri's death Kamaraj had emerged as the 'king maker," and he was determined to have the lady elected, not so much out of his loyalty to Nehru, but because he and his friends thought Indira Gandhi was just a *gungi gudiya* (a dumb doll) Desai got 169 votes, and she got nearly twice the number He claimed, in retrospect, that it had not been his ambition to become the Prime Minister He had contested her because "I did not consider Indiraji to be suitable for this office, and considered it my duty to oppose her in the election"

After the elections of 1967, he again declared his intention of contesting Indira Gandhi, but later backed out, seemingly, to save the party from breaking up, and accepted the lady a his leader The talks between the two, before he joined as the Deputy Prime Minister, could not have pleased the imperious lady Staking his claim for the second position, he had told her, "If I can speak with authority in your absence on your behalf, I can help you by joining your cabinet This will be possible only if I am given the position of Deputy Prime Minister Many capable persons have been returned to the Lok Sabha on behalf of the Opposition parties, and they are very good speakers As I have more experience, I can meet their arguments better than you You have not got much experience so far of this work I can reply more effectively to the Opposition It is, therefore, also necessary that I should be given the Home ministry"

Soon, the Central Hall of Parliament was agog with a controversy Morarji had been reported as having said that he did not consider Indira fit for her post, and Chavan was not fit for the Home ministry This was obviously an interpretation of what Morarji had told Indira Gandhi, but since no third person was present during the talks, Desai had no doubt in his mind that the lady herself had spread it around

Morarji got the Deputy Prime Ministership, but he had to content himself with the Finance portfolio, which he had not wanted The lady was merely biding her time When she stripped him of the Finance portfolio, suddenly and unceremoniously, she was to say that she wanted to "gain experience" of that ministry, which sounded like an echo of Morarji's plain speaking to her

Morarji had no manner of doubt in his mind that he was the most suitable man to become the Prime Minister of India But there were not many who shared this view In fact, there are MPs and politicians who have watched him closely for years, and would have considered it a "near-disaster" if Desai had become the Prime Minister after Jawaharlal Nehru Not merely because as the Chief Minister of Bombay he had banned liquor, outlawed kissing and drinking scenes in films, ordered all restaurants to close at midnight, and had come down with a heavy hand on all fun and frolic.

Quite apart from having the image of a "Hindu Calvin," there was a strong dictatorial streak in the man which had always been resented by all manner of people

Morarji had tried to be the unquestioned boss of the Gujarat Congress He would brook no dissent, shout down anybody who got up to present a different point of view than this own Many used to call him the *Sarvochch neta* (topmost leader), and he had obviously liked being called that He never told anybody not to call him the *Sarvochch*, and it soon turned into a topic of satire in Gujarati newspapers The cartoonists drew him as a long stick with a Gandhi cap on it That became the popular image of Morarji—a hard unbending stick with a Gandhian cover As the Chief Minister of Bombay, he had shown no aversion to hitting heads, and "hitting them with uncanny accuracy, resolve, and efficiency "[3] By his own admission, his police had opened fire hundreds of times Morarji says that when the Samyukta Maharashtra struggle was on, Nehru telephoned him from Delhi to say that he should not hesitate to "use the military and tanks," but he was proud of the fact that he could manage with his police force He estimated that almost a hundred people were killed in the police firings

At the meetings of the Gujarat Congress, the attitude of the *Sarvochcha* was always—"I have heard you, but I am right " People could see that if the *Sarvochcha* took one step further, they would have a dictator on their hands

Morarji had taken umbrage at being removed from the government under the Kamaraj Plan, but two years before this, he himself had been the strongest champion of the "ten-year rule" in Gujarat which would have pushed three of the seniormost state leaders—Dr Jivaraj Mehta, Rasikbhai Parikh, and Ratubhai Adani—out of the ministry

[3]Frank Moraes, *India Today*, Macmillan, New Delhi.

even to the Mahatma, to Mahatma Gandhi himself

And so, when a professed puritan like Desai was accused of "consorting with a Muslim lady," it made startling news The charge dates back to the time when he was the Chief Minister of Bombay The story, still told by the wags of Bombay, goes that Jagjivan Ram, the evergreen Central Minister, lay ill in a posh Bombay hospital under the care of one of the top physicians of the Tatas The VIP doctor was a colourful man who could well have taught some lessons to Dr Stephen Ward Much before the Profumo Affair came to light, the Bombay physician had made his mark, both as a doctor and a high-society fop He had his own bunch of Miss Keelers and Miss Mandys, and a good VIP-entertainer that he was, he had sent off one of his juiciest females to look after the ailing VIP from Delhi Desai went to visit Ram, and the lady spread her charm around, much to the sick man's chagrin, which has lasted to this day The story got around, and the then Union Home Minister, Govind Ballabh Pant, a kill-joy that he was, got the beautiful lady extradited to Pakistan, where she belonged Some wags even claim to have witnessed the "tearful scenes of parting "

When a Marathi journal chose to print a series of by-lined articles on the "affairs," no rejoinders came, and the stories, which could have been apocryphal, stuck But let it pass Even puritans must be forgiven their moments of weakness

The other smear has stuck to Desai like an indelible dark blot on his sparkling white khadi It was about his only son, Kantibhai Desai, now widely described as the "Sanjay Gandhi of the Janata Government " When Kantibhai Desai recently threw a foreign correspondent out of his father's house for comparing him to the Emergency's *enfant terrible*, he had a point—Whereas Sanjay Gandhi had "no experience I am 52 and have plenty of experience "[3]

The parallels between the two are hard to miss Sanjay was no good at studies Nor was Kantibhai He failed at the inter-science examination, and just as Indira Gandhi had defended her son and found excuses for his not doing well at school, here was the conscientious father Morarji Desai, rationalizing his son's failure as a student "One of the reasons for his failure was that he took science at my instance so that he could go in for engineering " Sanjay had aspired to be an automobile engineer, Kanti was a step ahead—he was set on aeronautical engineer-

[3]Kanti Desai in an interview to *India Today*, 16-31 December 1977

ing He became an apprentice in the Tata Airways Company on a stipend of Rs 50 per month But, in a short while, he was thinking of other things The tycoons of Bombay had seen the potential of this Minister's son They had started throwing their baits, and he had no hesitation in taking them Whereas Sanjay had his Tejas to promote him, Kanti had his Birlas, and the Shroffs, and the Ruias Not that Jayanti Teja was any stranger to the Desais In fact, it was Morarji Desai who is believed to have first inducted the Tejas into the Teen Murti House It was Desai who, as the Union Finance Minister, went to the shipyards of Nagasaki in 1962 to launch one of Teja's ships

One day, recalls Morarji Desai, R D Birla went to his house to see him As Desai was engaged with some other person, Birla sat in the drawing-room He saw Kanti, and asked him what he was doing He told him he was an apprentice in the Tata Airways Birla suggested him that it could be better if he went to America for training, instead of taking it in India Where was the money to go to America? asked Kanti Birla immediately offered to send him to America Shades of Teja?

When Desai came to know of the offer, he talked to Birla, and told him he should not have made the offer to Kanti But Birla told him he had "made the suggestion innocently, and had no motive in doing so" Indeed, he couldn't have had any motive, he would have made the offer to any bright looking young man in Bombay!

Kanti, in any case, proved a great one at getting rich quick Within years, he was rolling in wealth In October 1964, the personal secretary of Kanti, filed in affidavit saying, among other things, that his master had three cars in Bombay—two Fiats and a Chevrolet, he owned extensive plots of land, and had four flats in the poshest areas of Bombay, two imported refrigerators, one portable refrigerator, two Grundig radiograms, Chinese cutlery and crockery, and had spent Rs 10,000 to renovate his kitchen

Morarji's reaction to all this was, "Kanti is only an angry young man"

There was an utter naivete about Morarji Desai's explanations about the business dealings of his son After Kanti had joined the New India Insurance Company, its General Manager went to see Morarji Desai "I want to understand the reasons for engaging him (Kanti) for insurance work," he told the GM The latter assured him that Kanti's appointment had nothing to do with his being Morarji's son But, had he been given more salary than what they usually gave to others? Again the GM assured him that no favour had been shown

to Kanti That satisfied Morarji Desai, as though he had expected the business man to have told him that his son had been appointed because he was his father's son!

Morarji was convinced that his son was not using his influence on his clients Indeed, he was proud that his son had booked more clients than anybody else in the company in his very first year, and had bagged a prize for it By 1964, a public campaign had started against Kanti, and a memorandum entitled *On the Enrichment of Kanti Desai* was circulated among Congressmen of Maharashtra and Gujarat It gave the story of Kanti Desai and the Phoenix Mills, which had brought him his first big fortune

Way back in June 1949, a complaint was made to the Anti-Corruption Bureau, Bombay, alleging that the management of the Phoenix Mills had committed serious fraud in the purchase and consumption of stores Officers raided the mills, and seized truckloads of account books from the premises An expert in textile finance and economics was appointed to probe the affairs of the mills, and he came up with the charge of gross malpractices by the mill-owners

Morarji happened to be the Home Minister of Bombay when the report was submitted For some curious reason, he called for a report on the probe, and appointed a police man from Baroda to make another inquiry Eventually, a whitewashed report was submitted All the seized papers of the mills were returned to the Ruias, the proprietors, and within days, they were all consumed in a sudden fire. Within a year, Kanti had got insurance business worth Rs 30 lakhs from the Ruias

When the Kanti affairs burst like a stink-bomb in Parliament Morarji Desai made a solemn statement in the Lok Sabha, "My son has given up all business contacts since 1964, and has been working as my private secretary. When charges were made against him, I have made inquiries through police, and I have always found him miles away from such things It is only perverse people who are trying to circulate rumours of business contacts against him "

Which police officer would report against his son? Senior police officers of Bombay still remember the story of how Morarji Desai had censured police officers for not having taken the words of Kanti seriously This is how Morarji Desai himself tells the story, "When the ministry was formed in 1946, I was allotted a house on Narayan Daboolkar Road.. There was a quarrel outside my bungalow, and my son, Kanti, who saw the quarrel and the commotion complained

about it to the Commissioner of Police, requesting him to make the necessary bundobast My son was then 20 years old, and was studying in college The Police Commissioner did not appreciate my son's requesting him on the phone to take action, and told me that such requests might sometimes create an awkward situation The Commissioner's complaint did not appear to me to be proper The Police Commissioner was a capable officer, but was not beyond the usual English prejudices, as I discovered later on "

The other side of the story, about the drubbing that the pol ce officers got for not heeding Kanti, was something that was not forgotten for long

As for Kanti having severed all his business connections in 1964, to serve his father, there was the open letter from R K Karanj a to Morarji Desai in the *Blitz* dated 10 August 1968, which reproduced a photostat copy of the list of employees who were on the managerial staff of Dodsals as on 1 January 1967 Kanti's name was fifth on the list He was shown as the Director of Sales with a basic salary of Rs 2,050

Karanjia's letter had another story to tell It quoted a UN publica ion containing the summary proceedings of the meeting of the Board of Governors of the International Monetary Fund held at Rio de Janeiro in September 1967 The publication gave the names of those who constituted the Indian delegation at the IMF conclave—"Governor—Morarji Desai, Alternate Governor—L K Jha, and Advisers—S K Banerjee, Kanti Lal Desai, S Gohain, etc "

"We would like to know," Karanjia asked Desai, "whether the government met the cost of Kanti's stay in Brazil as an adviser to the Indian delegation If Kanti's gains are not due to your standing in public life, how else are we to explain the invitations Kanti gets by the dozen from business and other organizations abroad? Is there any other private secretary in that sprawling secretariat in New Delhi, apart from Kanti Desai, who is invited in his personal capacity to Tokyo, Taiwan, Manila, Seoul, etc ?"

In the Rajya Sabha, a PSP member, Banke Behary Das, read out excerpts from the *Korean Times* about Kanti's talks with South Korean Deputy Foreign Minister, and asked how Morarji Desai's honorary private secretary had suddenly become the roving ambassador of India?

It turned out that in 1968, Kanti went on a South East Asian tour when Morarji was in Manila An agreement was then signed between South Korea and India, whereby South Korea was to buy 300 tons of human hair from India, and in turn, export contracept ves to India

The deal was finalized between South Korean Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs and Kanti Desai, acting as "head of three man Indian Economic Mission" The then Commerce Minister, Dinesh Singh, knew nothing about this delegation

Just as Indira Gandhi claimed not to have had the foggiest idea of her son carrying on business dealt across her prime ministerial counter, Morarji Desai, too, pleaded ignorance in Parliament In a tone of injured innocence, he said, "My knowledge of my son's activities has never been of a detailed nature I have always taken a very detached view, and sought to ensure that he does not come anywhere near the discharge of my official responsibilities "

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"Morarji is a changed man," people were saying everywhere when he finally became the Prime Minister He has shed off his angularities and rigidities, they said He was no longer the dogmatic man he was, one was told, and indeed, he looked a little mellowed, a little more reasonable, a little more accommodative But you scratched the surface, and the old Morarji was all there still

Nothing revealed Desai, the Janata Prime Minister, more than his Press conferences, which was perhaps the reason why he soon forgot his promise of meeting the Press every month, if not more frequently

At his very first Press conference on 24 March 1977 he was asked, "Are you moving into 1 Safdarjang Road?" (the house where the former Prime Minister lived)

Morarji Desai—Why have I to move there? Is there any hallow attached to it?

Some months later, Morarji Desai moved to 1 Safdarjang Road

He was asked—There is a talk of toppling several state governments Will you approve of that?

Desai—I am not going to topple any state But if they topple themselves what am I to do?

Q—Sir, Jayaprakash Narayan has suggested that there should be a fresh poll for state assemblies where the Congress has lost (in the Lok Sabha elections of 1977)

Desai—Where the Congress has lost No, no If the governments there are legal governments, and they have the majority, how can we have fresh polls? It has to be done in a right manner Yes, it has to be done in such a manner that we do not repeat what the last govern-

ment had done

About a month later, Morarji Desai threatened to order fresh Lok Sabha polls if the Acting President, B D. Jatti, did not sign the proclamation dissolving nine of the Congress-ruled States in the country

Most of Desai's Press conferences turned into slanging matches, with nobody getting anywhere n the process, except that they occasionally showed Desai's particular brand of wit and humour

On 16 May 1977, a reporter began—Your colleague, Mr Charan Singh, has been the subject of controversy, both in the party and in the government

Desai cut him short—He is no controversy in the government Why are you seeing any controversy? Where is the controversy in the government? It is controversy only in the papers I have no controversy

Q—Mr Prime Minister, just now you said that Mr Charan Singh is not a controversy in the government, but the newspapers published a report that the Home Minister tampered with the official file, and you were also angry with the official Now what are the facts?

PM—Ask the newspaper When did he see me angry? I am not angry with anybody

Q—What are the facts?

PM—I have told you about the facts Now you depend on a journalist That shows what freedom we have given you This is proof of it We do not want to stop that Whatever is written, I don t want to stop it But if you want to burden your mind with the wrong information, how can I help it? *That is why you have to be careful about it in future*

Q—The question is we want to know the correct situation

PM—You want to open up things I do not want to help you

Q—But it is a free society

PM—Let me say, I am not going to help you in this process

Q—Things have to be opened up in a free society

PM—Not as you want

Q—Then let us have it as you want it

PM—I am doing that You are wanting to make me say what you want

Q—You are casting aspersions on us

PM—I am very sorry, what aspersions have I put on you Now tell me I will apologize Please tell me what aspersions have I made

Q—That it is wrongly reported

PM—I say it is wrongly reported It is not an aspersion How is it an aspersion? You prove it first You prove your story first, then I will tell you You may write many stories

Q—Sir, the question is very specific The question is whether the letter which the Home Minister wrote to the Election Commission in his capacity as Chairman of the dissolved BLD was withdrawn from the file?

PM—And why should I say anything about it? It is not on my records *I have no knowledge about it Well, something did happen* But nothing is there now Why are you bothered about the past? Are you doctors to take the post-mortem examination?

Q—Because the letter is back in the file

PM—If the letter is back in the file, it may not have gone out. Where is the proof?

Q—You are trying to take advantage

PM—Why shouldn't I? I want to give you an advantage Why do you object to my gett ng a legitimate advantage? Well, if you are interested in my getting a legitimate advantage all the while, certainly try to do so But I won't oblige you

Morarji Desai, many say, does not bother about the image he projects, *does not care what is written about him But several journalists who have written about him have had different experience During the first flush* of enthusiasm after becoming the Prime Minister, Desai started giving morning audience to the public, just as Indira Gandhi used to do Not to be left behind, Charan Singh had also started his morning durbars A lady journalist who reported on the three morning durbars of Delhi had called them the *Diwan e-Ams*, and had noted that while Indira Gandhi was "at her charming and attractive best," Morarji Desai was "at his impatient and dour worst " Soon after the piece appeared, the correspondent got a call from the South Block, "The Prime Minister would *like to see the person who wrote the article in yesterday's paper "*

It turned out that the Prime Minister was not so concerned about having been described as being "at his impatient and dour worst " It was another sentence in the piece which had upset him He had imme-*diately pointed it out to the correspondent.* "After-shave smelling of a pleasant after-shave lotion Why did you find it necessary to write that?" After all, he had often told people that he did not even use shaving soap, mere water was enough for him And now this pleasant after-shave lotion! Perhaps, imported at that! The correspondent explained that it was just an observation, and that she did not think

went abroad He had also pointed out that Kantı Desai, who accompanied the PM, travelled on a one-way concessional charter (Delhi-Amsterdam), but disembarked at London No extra charge was made for the Amsterdam-London sector "Air India obviously chose to extend this courtesy to Mr Kantibhai Desai "

The correspondent was summoned to the Parliament House to meet the PM "Did you do that story or was it some other colleague of yours?"

"I did it," said the reporter

"I am sorry you have got the facts wrong," the PM said

The reporter was sure he hadn't, but Desai was equally positive

"How about his son ?" The reporter thought this would surely put him off, but he was too ready to explain His son was his attendent, and had given up his business to be able to attend on him "You know I am 81, and I do need help What's wrong with it if my son helps me?"

The reporter told him there was nothing wrong except that Kanti had no position either in government or in the party, and reminded him that the success of the Janata had a lot to do with the doings of another Prime Minister's son

"Are you telling me my son is a Sanjay Gandhi?" the PM said coolly

The reporter said it was not important whether he said it or not What mattered was what the people understood or misunderstood Why should his son be with him at a Press conference? Why should he go with the PM to the public rallies? Why should he be present with the PM here, there, everywhere?

Suddenly, Desai was talking about his old age, about his son's devotion to him "I know people talk about him, but I also know that he will not do any wrong If you can cite one instance of wrong-doing on his part since I assumed office, I assure you I shall take action, I shall not even hesitate to resign "

* * *

The Air India Manager stationed in Moscow was in a state of flutter A row of passengers waited at his desk to have their tickets confirmed, but the poor Manager was utterly nervous "I have to rush to the Kremlin," he repeated as he flipped the tickets

What was up? What emergency could there be in the Kremlin? "There was an urgent call from Kantibhai, the PM's son He wants

to have his ticket rescheduled "

Kanti had accompanied his old father to Moscow, but now he wanted to go elsewhere Wasn't he supposed to accompany the Prime Minister back to India?

"No, he wants to go to Europe," said the Manager, as he hurried off to the Kremlin

Back in the Sovietskaya Hotel with its massive marble columns crystal chandeliers and mammoth ball-rooms, once a club for the nobles in the days of the Tzars, and now the Soviet Government's exclusive hotel for visiting delegations, the Prime Minister's crew made merry A crew of twelve, the crack team of the Air-India, with the most experienced captains and the sprightliest air hostesses They had flown the VIP plane from Delhi, but while the plane had carried on to London, the crack team had stayed behind For all the 7 days that the Prime Minister stayed in the Soviet Union, they wined and dined, and filled the corridors of the Sovietskaya with the sounds of night-long revelries, straight out of Dostoyevsky, it often seemed All very upsetting for the sedater guests in the hotel

On the flight back to India, the plane stopped at Teheran, and Kanti got down with his luggage To receive him, there was the same family, close to the Shahenshah of Iran, who had allegedly made a big pay-off to a VIP of the Emergency days for the Kudremukh Project Some of the loose ends of the deal remained to be tied, and whispers of another big pay-off could be heard from afar A few days in Teheran, and then, Kanti was off to Paris and Switzerland! Strange, that he should have forgotten that his father was 81 and needed his help!

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If Morarji Desai had carried on as a Deputy Collector, as he might well have, he would have retired from service in 1951 26 years later, he became the Prime Minister of India And there were years, not long ago, when he was written off as a "had been," an also ran! It was a tremendous come-back, by any standards, a tribute to his grit and tenacity

He had held many high posts, and with all his personal fads about health foods and daily dose of "water of life," he had won the respect and admiration of many for being a straight, upright man But never had he shown any spark of great leadership He had remained, essentially, a man bogged down in his files, a law and order man As a young Minister in Bombay, he had stalked the streets of the city at night noting

down the license numbers of speeding cars and trucks, and reporting them to the police If he had any philosophy of government, it was formed during the 12 "sinful years" that he served the English rulers, years that he later hated He had neither the charisma of a Nehru nor the gentleness and humility of a Lal Bahadur Shastri Just the firmness and rigidity of a magistrate bound by his service rules and manuals, and with no greater vision than that of an administrator geared to the task of re moving grievances It was not a mental equipment which could make for a good Prime Minister It could only help him push files, and drag on, or worse, drift

The tragedy of the first Janata Prime Minister was that he had remain ed, basically, a Deputy Collector

III

Charan Singh—"King That Shalt Be"

"Upon my head they plac'd a fruitless crown
And put a barren sceptre in my grip

LIKE THE three witches, at least three crystal-gazers have promised the crown to Charan Singh The only regret of the 76 year-old Home Minister, the Janata's "Sardar," is that he is not ten years younger [1] "But never mind," his astrologers and Tantriks, and gurus have assured him "You shall be the Prime Minister!" Hovering round his durbar are the old familiar faces which once thronged Indira's court Nemi Chand Jain alias Chandra Swami who almost overnight turned from a fraudulent contractor into a jet-set Tantrik, the dissipated Purshottam Nath Kapoor, the so called Tantrik from Lucknow who was nabbed in an air-conditioned railway coach with a woman and a bottle of Scotch, the mysterious Jai Gurudev whose slogans keep appearing like a rash on the walls of cities These and other pundits, exorcists, and black-magic men rub shoulders with the Madhu Limayes and Shyam Nandan Mishras and Nanaji Deshmukhs who compete for the heir-apparent's favour Collecting all the weird gurus and swamis for his master is the masked court jester, Raj Narain

It was Raj Narain who first nicknamed Charan Singh as "Chair Singh " Those were the days when this *bhakt* of Lohia's was an unabashed drum-beater of Chandra Bhanu Gupta, once the "uncrowned king of Lucknow " Raj Narain was then the biggest bee in Charan Singh's bonnet, debunking and denigrating him inside and outside the Uttar Pradesh Legislature Charan Singh had been an easy target Nobody

[1]Charan Singh in an interview published in *Dharamyug*, 8 May 1977.

could beat him at changing horses In three days he was on three sides "King of defectors," was a sobriquet that fitted him like a glove fits a hand

Before he mounted his Jat-Ahir onslaught against the Bania-Brahmin domination of UP, Charan Singh wrote a letter to C B Gupta, pledging his loyalty to him The shrewd little man who knew his friends and antagonists like the palm of his hand, wrote back a semi-official letter larded with sarcasm, "Pantji made you his Parliamentary Secretary I know how loyal you were to him Dr Sampurnanand gave you the status of a full-fledged Minister I know your loyalty to him I know how much I can depend on your loyalty"

Govind Ballabh Pant had picked this briefless lawyer of Ghaziabad (a queer parallel to a later-day briefless lawyer of Bhiwani) to be his Parliamentary Secretary in 1946 Pant had liked and trusted him, but Charan Singh felt he had not been given his due A strong complex rankled in his mind right from the beginning He seemed convinced that the Jats could never get the social and political status commensurate with their economic power In Meerut, his home district, the Jats constituted the most important proprietary community, but theirs was a non-elite caste in terms of traditional ritual hierarchies They were "backward," and Charan Singh felt he was being kept down deliberately by the elite class It came out in a speech he made in Lucknow after becoming the Home Minister of India "In 1946, I was made only Parliamentary Secretary, though I had better capabilities," he told the Janata Party legislators [a]

While he was loyal to Pant, he was secretly consorting with the British Governor for the creation of a separate Jat State When Pant came to know of it, Charan Singh pleaded his absolute innocence But even later, *as a Minister under Sampurnanand, C B Gupta, and* Sucheta Kripalani, Charan Singh continued to be the "guiding spirit" behind the move for a separate Jat State, of which he would have been the natural leader It was only when he himself became the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh that he dropped all talk about a separate Jatland

A self-righteous man, convinced of his own virtues and qualities, Charan Singh was always contemptuous of the people who had come to rule Uttar Pradesh More impetuous in his words those days, he would often describe, in his charmed circle, his colleagues in the successive ministries as "thieves and lechers' He never ceased to smart

[a]*National Herald*, Lucknow, 8 October, 1977

under the weight of worthless men, he was determined to ram his way to power

He had entered the portal of power with the image of a simple, straightforward man, deeply rooted in the Arya Samaji cult, a man with no hanky panky about him Ramrod-straight But even in those days, there were people who had seen a little deeper into the man A long-retired civilian of Uttar Pradesh still remembers a little incident from the time when Charan Singh was still a Parliamentary Secretary Some Supply Inspectors were due for promotion One day, the Secretary of the department concerned got a telephone call from Chaudhuri Charan Singh

"I believe you have drawn up a list of supply Inspectors who are to be promoted Could I have a look at the file?"

The Secretary said he didn't know about it, but he would find out Perhaps, one of the Under Secretaries was dealing with the file Some time later, the Secretary brought the file to Charan Singh

The young Parliamentary Secretary glanced through the file with his quizzical, half-shut, suspicious eyes When he came to the list of Supply Inspectors, he remarked, "I only want honest men to be promoted"

Certainly, the Secretary agreed Honesty had to be the main criteria

Charan Singh read the first name, and made a wry face "I have heard that this man is not at all honest There are many reports against him"

He read the second name, and again made a very wry face "This man? Very dishonest I am told" He went down the third, and the fourth, and the fifth name, and none, of them pleased him He had some complaint or the other against each

"But, Sir, this list has been prepared according to seniority, and their service records It's hard to know about their integrity and honesty unless there is something incriminating against them on their records"

By now, Charan Singh had come to a name which lay towards the bottom of the list He suddenly looked rather pleased with the name "This man, Man Singh, I am told is a very honest man There are very good reports about him"

"But he is too low on the list," the Secretary said "I don't think he would stand any chance of being promoted There are only a few vacancies to be filled up"

"I don't know, but honest men must be given a chance," the Parliamentary Secretary said

The Secretary didn't know Man Singh from Adam, but he could see that the Parliamentary Secretary had a very high opinion about him Within a few days of this incident, the Secretary happened to meet C B Gupta, then the Minister of the concerned department, and the officer narrated what had passed between him and Charan Singh

"What Inspector was he bothered about ?" C B Gupta asked

"There was someone called Man Singh Chaudhuri Saheb was saying he is very honest "

"*Arre,* Man Singh!" exclaimed Gupta, and burst into laughter "Don't you know Man Singh? "

The Secretary pleaded ignorance Perhaps he ought to have known who this man was "But, Sir, his name is too low on the list "

"*Arre bhai, kar do usko agar ho sake,*" said Gupta, "*wo Charan Singh ka chhota bhai hai !*" (Oh, do it if you can, he is Charan Singh's younger brother!)

It was Chaudhuri Charan Singh who contributed to the fall of the Sampurnanand Ministry By then, he had developed his "tactics of the marginal role"[3]—a third force which could play a crucial role in the factional politics of Uttar Pradesh In 1959, nine Ministers of the Sampurnanand Cabinet resigned to show their solidarity with C B Gupta Though Charan Singh had also gone against Sampurnanand, he did not resign along with the others He waited until his defection would be of decisive importance to Gupta It was widely known that when Charan Singh resigned a few months later, it was only with the promise of Gupta that he would support him for Chief Ministership He was let down, but he only bided his time for the right moment to strike

When C B Gupta formed his ministry after the elections of 1967,

[3]Subrata Kumar Mitra, in an unpublished dissertation

along with C B Gupta You sent two prominent confidants of yours, viz , Uma Shankar Dixit and Dinesh Singh to Lucknow with a view to persuading me to step down in favour of C B Gupta "

Charan Singh wanted C B Gupta to include three of his close lieutenants in the cabinet—Jayaram Verma, Udit Narayan Sharma, and Jagan Prasad Rawat He had also demanded that Gupta should drop three of his own supporters—Kailash Prakash, who had been a rival of Charan Singh in Meerut Congress, Banarsi Das, and Sheo Prasad Gupta, both of whom were faithful allies of C B Gupta

The emissaries of Indira Gandhi prevailed upon Charan Singh to withdraw from the leadership contest on the condition that the list of Cabinet Ministers would be finalized only after consultations with him But when Gupta got elected, he sent Charan Singh a list which neither included the men he wanted, nor excluded the three whom he wanted to be kept out Charan Singh flew into a rage, and threw the list "They are all liars," he is believed to have shouted His oft-repeated allegation that Indira Gandhi "never speaks the truth even by mistake" has its root in that first breach of promise Gupta, however, continued to maintain that he had never given an undertaking to Charan Singh, either to drop, or to include anybody

"It's a pure blackmail," Gupta said,[4] when Charan Singh and Jairam Verma refused to join the ministry

On 1 April 1967, just 18 days after the Gupta Ministry was formed, Charan Singh and 16 others walked over to the Opposition, and voted with them to reject the motion of thanks to the Governor's address Ram Manohar Lohia hailed him for having done the "correct" thing, and the PSP Chairman, N G Goray called it the "sign of the changing era of Indian politics It only signifies our entering into an era of brash power-politics "

Charan Singh's first SVD Government fell in less than 11 months, with its constituents full of bitter recriminations against one another But Charan Singh's "marginal tactics" once again came into play after the Congress split of 1969 The Syndicate Ministry of C B Gupta and the Indira Congress led by Kamalapati Tripathi were locked up in a power struggle In January 1970, 9 of the 16 cabinet ministers of Gupta resigned But a great one at offering allurements and temptations, Gupta offered Ministership to all and sundry, and inducted 29 new faces, but this was hardly enough Gupta's throne was slipping away He began

[4]*Link*, 9 April 1967

frantic efforts to win over Charan Singh "at any cost " The Tripathi group was also wooing Charan Singh hard The Jat leader was in his *elements This was just the sort of situation that suited his genius One* of C B Gupta's lieutenants, Krishnanand Rai, a sworn political enemy of Charan Singh, rushed to the latter with the offer of Chief Ministership Charan Singh was assured that Gupta would resign in his favour He would much rather have Charan Singh than allow Indira Gandhi's man to rule the state

After a week long horse-trading, Charan Singh declared that he would *lead another SVD, this time comprising the Congress (O), the Jana* Sangh, the SSP, and the BKD But he had also left his options open He had met Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in Delhi, and told Pressmen that he had left a decis on on the leadership of a possible BKD-Congress alliance to her He had even offered to merge with the Congress, but wanted this done after becoming the Chief Minister, because otherwise, "people will say I have done it for the sake of Chief Ministership "

At this point, Ram Subhag Singh leader of the Syndicate Congress, rushed to Lucknow to have fresh negotiations with Charan Singh The BKD Chief would not agree to meet Singh, but he had long talks with other emissaries of the Syndicate which wanted to wrest the assurance from him that he would never associate with Indira Gandhi Charan Singh had other ideas, he was waiting for the Prime Minister s visit to Lucknow

On the eve of her arrival, the BKD passed a resolution demanding that all issues concerning the formation of Congress-BKD coalition should be clarified immediately But, when Indira Gandhi arrived in Lucknow, Charan Singh got a big setback She showed little inclination to meet and thrash out the issue with him He went to a social gathering arranged for the *Prime Minister, but she did not pay any attention to him* This hurt the BKD Chief's *amour propre* He went to the house of Kamlapati Tripathi, but the pandit seemed reluctant to talk politics with him One of Charan Singh's aides booked a trunk call to H N Bahuguna, only to get a brusque reply from the Congress General Secretary

All this provoked the BKD to pass another resolution, which said that the party was not committed to a merger with the Congress

Charan Singh was now bent upon joining hands with his former enemy, C B Gupta, whom he used to describe as the "source of all corruption " Even so, he kept up his anti-Gupta stance, until he had received a copy of C B Gupta's resignation from Chief Ministership, including a request to the Governor that Charan Singh should be invited to form

a new ministry, which was exactly what Charan Singh wanted

That should have bound any man to supporting Gupta, but not Charan Singh He immediately wrote to Gupta to make it clear that he had still not made any commitment to Syndicate and other constituents of the proposed SVD coalition

Having assured the resignation of C B Gupta, and after sending him the letter, Charan Singh proceeded to establish contact with Baliram Bhagat who had been instrumental in initiating a dialogue between him and Indira Gandhi Bhagat was invited for talks to Lucknow And then followed a phrenetic series of "double negotiations" Charan Singh was having parleys with both the Congress (R) leaders and the representatives of the Opposition parties Sometimes, the parallel negotiations went on simultaneously, with the Congress (R) leaders sitting in one room, and the Opposition leaders in an adjacent room Perambulating between the two were the BKD leaders

Helping Charan Singh with the negotiations was his *alter ego*, Prithvinath Seth, a business magnate from Meerut For years, he remained not only the conscience-keeper, but also the money keeper of Chaudhuri Sahib Their close association had a story behind it When Charan Singh went to jail in 1940, he took about a thousand rupees as loan for the upkeep of his family, from Prithvinath's father, Gopi Nath Seth When Charan Singh came out of jail, he went to see the old Sethji He had taken three citizens of Meerut along with him, perhaps to help him persuade the Seth to write off the loan The Seth said he would make a special concession to him, and leave about Rs 300 or so This put off Charan Singh He walked off in a huff, refusing to accept any concessions

When Charan Singh became a Minister in Uttar Pradesh, Gopi Nath Seth threw a big party in his honour at Meerut An old timer in politics, who happened to attend the party, expressed his surprise to the Seth that he had organized such a lavish party for somebody he had treated like mud until sometime back "He is not a man, he is a Minister," said the old Sethji with a wink Soon his son, Prithvinath, became the eyes and ears of Chaudhuri Charan Singh With the ascendancy of Charan Singh, Prithvinath became a force to reckon with He first became an MLC in UP, and, later, a member of the Rajya Sabha His business grew by leaps and bounds He acquired a chain of cold storages and several agricultural farms in different parts of Uttar Pradesh

But to return to the "double negotiations," Prithvinath Seth and Charan Singh's wife, Gayatri Devi, who was also a BKD legislator, threw

their weight in favour of an alliance with the Congress It was better to rely on the support of one party, they pleaded, rather than depend on a motley group of parties which had already let him down once during the first SVD Government Charan Singh allowed himself to be persuaded The four-day lurid drama, which began with the acceptance of C B Gupta's resignation on 10 February 1970, ended with the announcement to newsmen by Indira's negotiator, D P Mishra, that a "complete accord" had been reached between Charan Singh and the Congress (R)

C B Gupta had been outmanoeuvred, but he was determined to avenge himself some day

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Congressmen in Meerut had often described Charan Singh as a "dictator "[5] Not a leaf could stir in the District Congress without his sanction 'In 1946, 1952, and 1957, no Congressman, who did not enjoy the favour of Charan Singh, received a Congress ticket from any rural constituency in Meerut "[6]

A Congressman of the district gave this description of Charan Singh —"He is not accommodating Charan Singh wants abject loyalty You must bow down, and then accept some small grace from the omni potent Chaudhuri Charan Singh He wanted that no leader should come to Meerut except he alone He wanted it (Meerut) as his own *jagir* "

The case of Mool Chand Shastri is often cited as an instance of Charan Singh's political style Mool Chand was also a Jat and a protege of Charan Singh In 1953, he got Shastri elected as the President of the Meerut District Board But soon, Shastri showed that he had ambitions of his own He started running the District Board in his own way Charan Singh got wild, and ordered his followers to bring a motion of no confidence against Shastri The motion failed, but Charan Singh was not to be beaten Three years later, Charan Singh saw to it that he was ousted, and also ensured that he got no ticket for the 1957 elections

In the 1957 elections, Chaudhuri Charan Singh escaped defeat in his own citadel of Chhapraulı by just a few hundred votes One of his contestants was a Harijan Must have been a queer fish to have had the temerity to challenge the ' dictator " Soon after the elections, the Harijan was found murdered, and a number of Jats were allegedly involved

[5]Paul R Brass, *Factional Politics in an Indian State*, p 139
[6]*Ibid*, p 141

in the case The government, however, withdrew the case after Charan Singh became the Home Minister of Uttar Pradesh

Charan Singh drew his strength from the powerful peasant proprietors of his community whose cause he served He was their leading ideologist, and had even crossed swords with Jawaharlal Nehru at the Nagpur Congress session in 1959 over the question of cooperative farming Charan Singh had called it a Bolshevist move, and had opposed it tooth and nail He had been a prominent member of the UP Zamindari Abolition Committee, and had worked hard to ensure that "landlordism may not raise its head again "[7] He was a champ on of the independent peasant proprietors who control the power-base in his own home district

Charan Singh was aware that the Jats, powerful as they were, could not by themselves provide the sort of thrust he needed for a political take-off So, he gradually sought to enlarge his political base to take in the Ahirs, Gujjars, and Rajputs—*Ajgar* as they called the combination of these four castes In eastern UP, he projected himself as the leader of the Ahirs, in Bihar, he described himself as the "oldest leader of the Yadavas"

But Charan Singh is a professed non-believer in such narrow things as caste and community He has always had a Harijan servant in his household, you would be told His critics, of course, liken it to the Negro 'showboys" that the White establishments in America employed to show how anti-racist they were

Charan Singh has but his anti-caste belief on record Way back in 1954, he wrote a long letter to Jawaharlal Nehru suggesting that for recruitment to gazetted jobs in government, marrying outside the narrow circle of one's own caste should be made an essential qualification He pleaded for similar stipulations for becoming Legislators "Men like me know from experience," Charan Singh wrote, "what it means to be born in castes other than those which are regarded or regards themselves as privileged The contemptuous treatment that is meted out, and the social discrimination that attaches by virtue of mere birth, to members of such castes, has often led to mass desertions or conversions to other faiths Whatever be the obstacles, if an amendment of the Constitution on these lines can be secured, it will, according to *my little mind* (italics mine), be a service to the country " In reply, Nehru said, " I cannot bring myself to think of the choice of marriage being controlled by legislation or by inducements offered "

[7]Charan Singh, *Agrarian Revolution in Uttar Pradesh*

Somewhere deep inside Charan Singh was a rankling sore, a deep complex, about his not belonging to one of the so-called "elite" communities It came out again and again In a speech at Mirehchi (UP) in December 1977, the Union Home Minister said, "I am a Jat, born in a Jat family A Muslim I can become immediately, but I cannot become a Brahmin, I cannot become a Rajput Nor can I even become a Vaishya And if I want to become a Harijan, even that is impossible, because the Constitution does not permit it It's better if this sort of caste system is destroyed "

When one of his daughters married a Kayastha office clerk, Charan Singh was in tantrums The Jat brotherhood in his village threatened to ostracize him "*Uska hukka pani band karo*," they said Charan Singh went rushing to Noorpur to assuage his community They held a *chowpal*, and all the rugged, sturdy Jats sat around

"*Jaton men launda nahi mila tumhe*?" (You didn't get a Jat boy?), they asked accusingly

Charan Singh tried to reason with them How would they have liked it if the girl had run away with the Kayastha boy without marriage? Would that have been better? '*Nak nahi kat jati tumhari*?" (Wouldn't you have lost your face?)

The Jats eventually calmed down

"Charan Singh is a Jat first and Jat last," remarked a UP politician who had been close to him for years

For any post in his party, caste is a very important consideration for Chaudhuri Charan Singh "And the man must belong to the rural areas, must have enough land to support himself He must be a kulak "

Ram Gopal, a former BKD member of the Upper House in UP, recalls one occasion when they were discussing candidates for one of the party committees When they came to the first candidate, Charan Singh asked, "What is his name?"

"Raghu Raj," said Ram Gopal

"Raghu Raj Singh?" asked Charan Singh

"No, he is not a Singh, he is just Raghu Raj "

"But what is he?" asked the leader

"He is a Kurmi "

Charan Singh passed it with a "will do" sort of expression

Ram Gopal, a non backward, hesitates to talk about the way Charan Singh ditched him at a crucial point in his career But the story comes out After his withering defeat in the elections of 1971, Charan Singh went to Ram Gopal, and said he wanted to bring out a weekly journal

Ram Gopal agreed to work for the Weekly, but said he would not take any money for it

Charan Singh was happy "What I wanted to tell you, you have said yourself," he told Ram Gopal

They brought out "Nav Kranti," and Ram Gopal worked for it day and night Came the time for the Council elections in UP, and some people suggested to Charan Singh that he should put up Ram Gopal He was made a candidate, and Ram Gopal went and thanked Charan Singh

But a few days later, Charan Singh asked Ram Gopal, "I hear that C B Gupta has offered you a seat in the Council or the Rajya Sabha?" An emissary of C B Gupta had indeed approached Ram Gopal, who had been writing very critical articles against Gupta in the Weekly He had been told that Gupta would be happy to make him a member of the Council or the Rajya Sabha But Ram Gopal had turned down the offer

He told Charan Singh what had happened The BKD leader had looked at him with his half-closed, suspicious eyes, and said, "*Chandravati bahut ro rahi hai*" (Chandravati has been weeping) Chandravati, a close relation of Charan Singh, now a Minister in the UP Government, had also wanted to be a member of the Upper House, and had approached Charan Singh

Ram Gopal was nonplussed He didn't say anything But he was told that Charan Singh had directed some of his men not to support him And indeed, when the voting took place, twelve members of the BKD went against him openly, and it was with great difficulty that Ram Gopal got elected No disciplinary action was taken against the BKD rebels

One of the Legislators who crossed the floor with him in 1967 was Ram Narayan Tripathi When he began selecting men for his ministry, it was suggested that he should have Tripathi as one of them He said no One of his supporters pointed out, much to Charan Singh's anger, that whenever a Brahmin's name came up, he always opposed it. That sealed the fate of Tripathi as far as Chaudhuri Charan Singh was concerned In the mid-term elections of 1969, Tripathi was defeated

Charan Singh could not forget the concerted effort that Brahmins and Vaishyas had made to thwart his rise to prominence He could not forget that C. B Gupta had gone back on his promise to support him for the Chief Ministership Nor could he forget that the Bania-Brahmin clique had always been careful to see that as a Minister he had as little power as possible When he was the Minister of Agriculture under

C B Gupta, most of the normal responsibilities of the department were taken away and divided among other Ministers, more loyal to C B Gupta When Gupta's protege, Sucheta Kripalani, became the Chief Minister, she gave Charan Singh the portfolio of Forests, and the joke went around that he had been made the "Minister for Rest" In the politics of his home district, too, Charan Singh could see that C B Gupta was trying his best to undermine his position

His deep-seated resentment often burst out, "*Bania ne kabhi hukcomat ki hai? Hukcomat to Rajputon ne aur Jaton ne ki hai* !" (Have the Banias ever ruled? It's the Rajputs and the Jats who have ruled) [8]

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Charan Singh was the first Chief Minister in the country to arm himself with dictatorial powers to detain citizens without trial The Preventive Detention Ordinance was his answer to the student agitation and land-grab movement in the state The measure formed an important part of his strategy to protect the interests of the peasant proprietors Charan Singh left people in no doubt about the purpose of his Ordinance At a hurriedly called Press conference on 4 August 1970, he circulated a statement in which he warned, "I hope they (the agitators) will not grumble, if their venture does not prove to be a picnic, or if they do not find the jails places of comfortable living that they have become since the advent of Independence" What he obviously meant was that he was going to restore the conditions prevailing in jails during the British days, and reintroduce the tortures then practised [9]

Claiming to represent the "Will of the people," by virtue of being the leader of the majority group in the Assembly, Charan Singh declared that mass movements like the ones led by Mahatma Gandhi had 'no relevance today" He debunked the criticism of "progressive politicians and arm chair critics," including some belonging to the Congress (his allies at that time), who had expressed the view that darkness had descended upon Uttar Pradesh following the promulgation of his Ordinance [10]

With his confidence already bordering on arrogance,' wrote one political commentator, "he (Charan Singh) has decided to attack the

[8]Ram Gopal, MLC, in an interview with the author
[9]*Patriot*, 5 August 1970
[10]*The Statesman*, 18 August 1970

university students by taking away their right to form their unions "[11]

People recalled that when he had been the Revenue Minister of UP, about 27,000 *patwaris* had gone on a lightning strike, and had submitted their resignations as a pressure tactics Charan Singh accepted all the resignations, and appointed 27,000 new employees, christening them "Lekhpals "

One of his actions as the Chief Minister was to order the export of *gur* from the state, which brought a windfall to the *gur* manufacturers, mostly rich peasants It was estimated that by this one decision, the Muzaffarnagar *gur mandi*, controlled by Jat peasants, earned several crores of rupees

When Chaudhuri Charan Singh visited Meerut and Muzaffarnagar, the exuberant mandi-owners showered hundred rupee notes on their hero "That day, he must have collected something like Rs 10 lakhs," remarked an eye-witness from Meerut

Charan Singh was worshipped like a deity in these parts, and people showered money on him like they would never do in a temple Rough estimates of "purses" presented to him, and the money showered on him during his visits to these areas put the figure around a crore of rupees His own partymen say that it would be difficult to account for all the money The main treasurer of Charan Singh was his favourite Seth from Meerut, Prithvinath, but how the money was used remains a mystery to many

Charan Singh, of course, would never touch any of this money himself No deity does But people had noticed the sudden rise of Charan Singh's new big building in the Saket Colony of Meerut It had perhaps gone up without the knowledge of Charan Singh, who had no time to spare from his politics Even before the building was completed, it was let out on a huge rental to the State Electricity Board, a fact which crept into the Audit Report of the Board, and caused much trouble to its authorities Some supporters of Charan Singh blame this fact on Prithvinath and Charan Singh's powerful wife, Gayatri Devi "When Charan Singh came to know that the house was rented out to a government department, he got wild," they say

In 1970, Charan Singh announced his decision to nationalize the sugar industry in the state, but soon he retraced his steps He appointed a three-man sugar nationalization committee and put his favourite, Prithvinath Seth, on it, allegedly to oppose the move Seth was related

[11] R K Garg in *National Herald*, Lucknow, 12 August 1970

to Gujar Mal Modi, one of the sugar barons of western UP, who was said to have contributed a huge amount to the BKD coffers during the elections It was also alleged that the Charan Singh Government had helped to crush a labour movement in Modinagar A police firing had been ordered to quell the labour agitation Later, Modi was awarded a Padma Shri, for which again, he was said to have paid a good price

The Charan Singh Government retraced its steps on sugar nationalization by neatly covering it up with a legal controversy At the very first meeting of the sugar committee, Prithvinath Seth insisted that before the take-over of the industry, legal opinion should be sought The state government, assisted by the advice of the Advocate General of UP, held that it was not competent to take over the mills Then followed a controversy between the state and the central government, with the latter advancing the opinion of the Attorney General, who advised that the state government was competent on its own to nationalize the industry The stalemate continued till the imposition of the President's rule in October 1970

Soon after his break with the Congress, Charan Singh said in a statement that "it was unabashedly propagated that I had accepted millions of money (sic) from factory-owners as a bribe for deferring the take-over of their factories Maybe, judging from their standards, my accusers honestly believe in what they say"

He went on to give details of how he had requested the centre for an "open or secret, judicial or CBI inquiry," but this had not been accepted by Indira Gandhi

In the meantime, an interesting case throwing some light on Charan Singh's Government had come up before the Allahabad High Court Justice G S Lal had admitted a writ petition against the appointment of a Government Receiver at Raza Buland Sugar Factory of Rampur The petitioner had pointed out how the factory had been put to a loss of Rs 30,000 per day after the appointment of the Receiver The total dues of the factory had gone up from Rs 68 95 lakhs to Rs 117 lakhs

The man whom the Charan Singh Government had appointed as the Receiver was Cane Inspector, Man Singh, the "honest brother" of Chaudhuri Charan Singh No action could be taken against him

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"If Charan Singh has his way," remarked one of his old political associates, "he would restore all the Princes in all their glory" He had been

one of the staunchest opponents of the move to abolish privy purses, and had insisted that it was a "moral duty to uphold a contract solemnly made" He had cited the instances of England and Japan to prove his point "That *abolition of the privy purse will strengthen and ensure success* of democracy is pure bunkum Advanced countries like Britain and Japan are not less democratic or less progressive for the maintenance of their Kings and Princes Royalty was not abolished even by Socialist parties when they came to power in these countries"

The very word Socialism is an anathema to Charan Singh, said Ram Gopal, who has perhaps known him better than most of his political allies One day, Ram Gopal asked Charan Singh what the ideology of his party, the BKD, was

"I believe in Gandhism," he said "I don't believe in Socialism"

"But Gandhi never said he was against Socialism," Ram Gopal said

"Gandhi could never talk about Socialism," said Charan Singh

A few days later, Ram Gopal took an article entitled "My Socialism" by Gandhi, and read it out to Charan Singh He made a wry face, and said, "I still don't like this word Socialism"

But now, Charan Singh talks about his "Gandhian Socialism"

Jawaharlal Nehru once told a politician from UP that Charan Singh belonged to the 17th or the 18th century He had simply no connection with the *zeitgeist*, the spirit of the times Somebody went and conveyed this to Charan Singh, and he sent off a letter of protest to Nehru How did he say such a thing about him?

It is a strongly entrenched belief of Charan Singh that one of Gandhi's biggest mistake was to choose Jawaharlal Nehru to be the Prime Minister As long as this country has an urban oriented leadership, he sees no hope for India Class consciousness, he thinks, is the biggest block for him "A son of a kisan running the show in Delhi? No, how can that be! The Press cannot swallow my rural character"

But who could have looked more of a rustic than Gandhi? And who could be more acceptable, even with the most sophisticated of men, than Gandhi?

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It was Raj Narain, the "evil genius" of Charan Singh, who persuaded him to withdraw his letter from the Election Commission, creating a major crisis in the Janata Party Charan Singh is capable of being blunt and ruthless, but he is not the one for manoeuvres He is fond of playing an easy game of cards, not chess **He can** easily be manipulated by his

flatterers, which is what happened, and is still happening

Raj Narain squatted before the Home Minister almost in a mood of "dharna," and started his needling "They are trying to humiliate you, that's all In the Lok Sabha elections, you were the final authority for distributing all the tickets in northern India Now, they have made you only an observer for UP They have downgraded you"

Charan Singh listened, as Raj Narain and others went on recounting their humiliations "Is your group adequately represented in the cabinet? How many of your men have been made Governors? How many have become Ambassadors? All the important posts are being filled up by them "

Their biggest frustration had come when Chandra Shekhar had become the Janata President *"Ek Young Turk ko lakar mathe par bitha diya"* (They foisted a Young Turk on our heads), Raj Narain had been fuming for days

Slowly, Charan Singh was getting worked up Raj Narain had tried this before, in the Willingdom Hospital, when he had wanted to get a letter from him in support of Morarji He could see that he was succeeding again

"The honourable course for you is to resign from this bogus observership," Raj Narain told him

Charan Singh was coming round to his view "Withdraw the election symbol Then they will know your power" It was the BLD symbol under which the Janata Party had fought and won the Lok Sabha elections If it was withdrawn at this juncture, it would create a first-class crisis in the party, and Chandra Shekhar & Co would knuckle down before them *"Lagao phone Election Commission men,"* Raj Narain asked one of his cronies Charan Singh was almost forced into talking to the Deputy Chief Election Commissioner The letter was lifted from the file and brought to the Home Minister

On 11 May 1977, Chandra Shekhar got an urgent message from the Election Commission asking him to decide what his party's election symbol would be There was no time, it had to be done that very day The shocked President talked to his colleagues in the party and the government They decided to face the challenge boldly Chandra Shekhar called an emergency meeting of the Working Committee to decide on some other symbol Morarji Desai, in the meantime, summoned the Deputy Chief Election Commissioner and gave him a dressing down for having tampered with the Commission's records The officer rushed to the Home Minister's residence in utter panic By then, Chandra Shekhar

had got it conveyed to Charan Singh that if the missing letter did not reach the Commission by 4 P M , the party would go ahead and chose some other symbol Raj Narain was now n a flutter Things had not moved according to his plans He had even got Charan Singh's letter of resignation from UP observership, and had it sent to the Janata Party President The only way was to retrieve their steps as fast as possible The letter was sent back to the Commission, to be placed where it belonged

On 14 May 1977, Raj Narain had organized a demonstration outside the house of Chandra Shekhar "*Charan Singh nahi to chunao nahi*" (No Charan Singh, no elections), they had shouted themselves hoarse But that very evening, a flustered Raj Narain flew like Prospero's Ariel to the Janata Party headquarters, took Charan Singh's resignation letter, and tore it "Charan Singh is exactly where he was," he told curious reporters "He will work as the observer in UP There is no crisis in the party"

Charan Singh's biggest *faux pas* was yet to come

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Charan Singh seldom smiles, But that morning, a little smile played on his lips as he sat in the glare of arc-lights and flashing bulbs He looked triumphant, on the top of the world The Home Minister was addressing a Press conference in the Shastri Bhawan, the morning after Indira Gandhi's dramatic arrest Not many congratulatory telegrams had reached him yet, but it appeared from his answer that he was expecting a truckload of them The CBI was very efficient, he was telling the Pressmen, with a sense of great satisfaction "Any country can be proud of such an organization" Charan Singh had made a name as an efficient administrator in UP, as one of the most hardworking and thorough Ministers He must have done his homework well, some thought But there were others who had their doubts What if the charges against Indira Gandhi failed? Would he resign? "Why should I resign?" he said smugly, confident that nothing could go wrong

A huge crowd had gathered at the Tis Hazari Court Word had got around that Indira Gandhi was going to be produced there Instead, she was driven from the Officer's Mess in the Police Lines, where she had shared a room in the night with Vinoba's disciple, Sushila Deshpande, to the Magistrate's Court on the Parliament Street Barricades had been put up all around the barrack-like courts Riot policemen with wicker

shields stalked the roads Onlookers had gathered, and there were slogans and counter-slogans "Hang Indira," 'Long Live Indira"

Tear-gas shells were lopped outside as the lawyers argued She got some of the gas in her eyes as she stood in the dock "Get me some water," she said, and Sanjay Gandhi rushed out to get it She soaked a handkerchief in the water and dabbed it on her eyes

Almost an hour later, she was a free woman, released unconditionally, because the Magistrate could find "no reasonable grounds for detention of the accused" Overnight she had become something of a martyr The case had been bungled all the way down the line

"Even mummy herself couldn't have written a better scenario," a jubilant Rajiv Gandhi told a foreign correspondent that evening Indeed, it seemed as though Charan Singh had just followed the dictates of the lady She had been itching for just this kind of a break It was a godsend "Political prisoners," commented *Le Monde*, "are often regarded as martyrs in India, where prison, as was once the case for the majority of the members of Desai's Government, can be an antechamber of power"

The impetuous Charan Singh had played into her hands He had been goaded by the cronies at his court, who told him day in and day out, that the Shah Commission was stealing the thunder that was his by right "What is this Shah Commission?" one of his close supporters had incited him, "isn't it your creation? And yet, it is getting all the credit Have her arrested, and the country will be at your feet You will be the nation's hero"

For weeks, Charan Singh had been announcing from the housetops that the net was "closing in on bigger fish" People close to him knew several days in advance that Indira Gandhi would be arrested on 2 October, the birth anniversary of Gandhi While there is no doubt that Indira Gandhi had been tipped off about her impending arrest (she had even kept her cyclostyled statement ready), there are two versions about how she got to know of it According to one, it was one of her loyal officers in the CBI who informed her, according to another, the information was passed on to her by a Tantrik having connections in both camps

She had been given the chance for just the sort of dramatics that she excels at

"Handcuff me!" she shrieked at N K Singh, Superintendent of Police (CBI), when he reached 12 Wellingdon Crescent around 5 P M on 3 October 1977 "I will not go unless I am handcuffed," she roared

Sanjay Gandhi was already making phrenetic telephone calls to his hoodlums around the city From another phone, R K Dhawan was making calls to the Congress leaders, and newspaper offices One reporter got a call from Maneka Gandhi's *Surya*, telling him that if he rushed to Indira Gandhi's residence, he might get a good story

"Where's the warrant of arrest and the FIR report?" Indira Gandhi asked N K Singh

The CBI Officer seemed to be in a blu funk already, as though he were the accused "It's not necessary for the CBI," he mumbled, "to serve a copy of the FIR or a warrant of arrest"

"That's Charan Singh's new law," interjected Indira Gandhi's lawyer, Frank Anthony

"I'll not budge until you handcuff me," repeated Indira Gandhi in rage "Bring the *hathkari* and take me" She rushed inside

The crowds had started gathering When one Press correspondent reached the house, he found H K L Bhagat a former Minister, locked in a wordy duel with the CBI Officers And then, some officer presented Indira Gandhi a sheet of paper, later described as the FIR

She sat on a chair in the verandah, reading aloud its contents Besides her, stood her lawyer and A N Mulla, a former judge and Congress MP When she had finished reading it, she again shouted at the officers, "Bring the handcuffs and take me"

She took her own time, almost three hours to get ready The CBI Officials told her she could be released, even at her house, if she would furnish a personal bond "Why should I?" she shrieked, and disappeared inside again

Before she finally came out to go with the police, her former Defence Minister, Bansi Lal, button-holed some of the correspondents, and requested them to put some questions to her so that her departure could be delayed a little He said that she had desired that some reporters should "engage her in conversation"

She looked glum and uptight as she came out, but the moment the cameras flashed, she brightened up For once, she was really welcoming the milling crowd of correspondents around her She was more than willing to answer any question In fact, she waited for questions It was not until 8 o'clock that she was ready to leave Perhaps that was the auspicious time suggested by her pundits By then, the storm-troopers had gathered, and it was a rowdy caravan that followed her on the journey towards Badkhal lake Followed the farcical scene at the railway level-crossing, with the former Empress of India sitting on a culvert,

and refusing to go outside the territory of Delhi

A more inept handling, from beginning to end, could not have been imagined, and yet, Charan Singh was defending it as "fully justified" The consideration shown to Indira Gandhi, he said, was the offshoot of his respect for her "I regard her as my ownsister," he said a few days later "She has been the Prime Minister for 11 years, she is the daughter of a person who had ruled the country for long" As though all this could cover up his rash and clumsy action

He had convinced the Prime Minister and some of his other colleagues that there were "foolproof criminal cases" against Indira Gandhi, and there was simply no chance anything going wrong He had been so cock sure that he did not even consider it necessary to consult the Law Minister of the legal aspects of the case A single action, which was meant to turn him into a great hero, had exposed the myth of his administrative ability and thoroughness

He had almost torpedoed the Shah Commission Even as the Home Minister was triumphantly addressing his Press conference on 4 October, Justice J C. Shah adjourned the Commission *sine die* He had taken the arrest as an interference with the working of the Commission At one stage, he even submitted his resignation, but the Prime Minister persuaded him to withdraw it "It would be the end of the Janata Government," Morarji told J C Shah

A behind-the-scene drama was being enacted at Charan Singh's house One of the names which figured in the CBI's arrest list was K K Birla, the industrialist and newspaper-magnate Just a few days before Indira Gandhi's arrest, Raj Narain had arranged a meeting between K K Birla and the Home Minister The industrialist had gone to Charan Singh's house, but the meeting had been a rough one for Birla His great champion, Raj Narain, is said to have pleaded with the Home Minister that it would not be "wise" to alienate Birla, that he was "not just an individual, but an empire" K K Birla, who was kept informed of every development, had got enough hint of the impending action He flew abroad

On 4 October, circles close to Charan Singh were agog with rumours that a big operation had been mounted to oust the Home Minister They had been told that the Chief Executive of a business house had arrived in Delhi to manage the "Operation Charan Singh." Preparations were afoot to buy off some of the Janata MPs Around 9-30 that

were cops behind every bush Coming out of the house was the saintly looking Jai Gurudev, accompanied by Raj Narain The Health Minister touched the Baba's feet, took his blessings, and accompanied Nanaji Deshmukh inside

Charan Singh was huddled with his three great advisers—Raj Narain, Nanaji Deshmukh, and Dinesh Singh, the former blue-eyed boy of Indira Gandhi, who had now found his way into the Janata Party Charan Singh, it is believed, was advised not to take on too many enemies at a time

When Charan Singh returned from a short visit to Lucknow, he found a letter from the Party President, Chandra Shekhar, conveying his anguish over the mishandling of Indira Gandhi's arrest The Home Minister smelt a personal censure, particularly because Chandra Shekhar's letter had been endorsed by the Party Secretaries He wrote out his resignation from the government When his followers heard of this, they rushed to him "If you resign, the Janata Government will collapse," they argued with him Chandra Shekhar, too, was persuaded to write another letter saying that it had never been his intention to cast any aspersion on him Charan Singh hastily withdrew his resignation

It was a somewhat different version that he gave to the Press "The political responsibility (for the mishandling) is mine," he said in an interview a few weeks later "That is why I wanted to resign .. According to the British tradition, I should have resigned And my resignation is still written out But my friends said that if British traditions are followed in other matters, then I should resign, but if not, I should not resign How long will the Janata Party last if you resign, my friends said . "[12]

Whatever his "friends" thought, Charan Singh's prestige had touched the rock-bottom The "Steel Man" had been exposed as hollow But to cover up his great *faux pas*, he went around the country making brave statements, some of which he later disclaimed, when in trouble "You will be surprised to know," Charan Singh said in an interview to a Bombay journal, "that I and the Home Secretary had a talk with him (Justice Shah) more than two months ago, and we told him we would look into such cases (of corruption) ourselves" When he was accused in Parliament of having interfered with the working of the Shah Commission, Charan Singh declared blandly that he could not

[12] *Sunday*, October 1977.

recall any occasion on which he talked to Justice Shah after he had accepted the assignment

Charan Singh's friends were anxious to redeem his image They resorted to the same technique that Sanjay Gandhi had used to boost his mother's sagging morale They started carrying truckloads of people from the villages of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana to show to the world how powerful their leader was The first "solidarity rally," so reminiscent of the dark old days, was on 14 November, when village folks in thousands poured into the capital to hail Charan Singh The day had been well-chosen—it was the birthday of Jawaharlal Nehru, whose image had to be shattered The moving spirit behind the rally, Raj Narain, shouted himself hoarse in condemning those who were "indulging in acts of mud-slinging against the Home Minister" A resolution moved by one of the "friends" and carried unanimously, expressed unstinted support of the masses to Charan Singh, and condemned the ' conspiracy of the capitalists and bureaucrats to malign him, and force him to quit the Home Ministry "

The Delhi Police had challaned about 250 trucks which had brought the supporters of Charan Singh from outside the Delhi territory But the challans were later set aside "following a policy decision" The Traffic SP was transferred

The 14 November rally was merely a "rehearsal" for the real tamasha, which took Delhi by a storm on 23 December 1977 The occasion was the 76th birth anniversary of Chaudhuri Charan Singh In a "Dilli Chalo" appeal which had preceded the "Kisan Rally," Chand Ram, one of the prominent supporters of Charan Singh, declared to the people, "He is a Messiah for the peasants and workers He alone has the courage to root out casteism He has taken upon himself the burden of cleansing public life of corruption and filth The credit for restoring a government of the rule of law goes to him He is the one who has put his hand on the biggest personalities and the capitalists The credit of sowing the seed of Janata Party, first by setting up the Bharatiya Kranti Dal in 1973-74, and then forming it as one party by uniting all the Opposition elements, goes to him If he, who was born in a simple peasant family and known poverty, cannot do good to Harijans, the backwards, the peasants, and the workers as the Home Minister *of our government with years of administrative experience, who else can?"*

"Now you know the road to Delhi," the mighty leader declared to the lakhs of peasants brought to Delhi to pay homage to him He had

never been able to subdue his anti urban bias—' they cannot swallow my rural character A son of a kisan running the show in Delhi? " Years ago, when Charan Singh was still very much a UP phenomenon, a perceptive journalist had seen through his ambition— His (Charan Singh's) stamping ground is Lucknow, but his telescopic sights might be focused on New Delhi "[13]

Now that he had made it to Delhi, here was an occasion to show the city dwellers the power that was behind him "You cannot remove poverty unless you capture power, and run the government," *he told* the kisans

An array of Ministers and Chief Ministers, and Janata Party leaders had turned up to hail him as "the greatest contemporary Indian leader' and the "Iron Man" Significantly, the only two portraits displayed at the rally were of Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Patel

Morarji Desai had dissociated himself with the celebration, saying that he did not believe in the "pernicious personality cult" This was not an attitude he had adopted only for this occasion Way back in 1966, when friends and admirers of C B Gupta staged a massive show in Lucknow to celebrate his birthday and present him with a purse of Rs 43 lakhs, Morarji Desai had sent a message to the organizers, saying that he would have attended the function "but, on principle, I do not take part in birthday celebrations"

Another colleague of Charan Singh, Jagjivan Ram, had refused to give his comment on the Kisan Rally, and when pressed further, he said, "Don't ask me vulgar questions"

When a Harijan MLA of Uttar Pradesh wrote to Charan Singh objecting to the manner in which the birthday had been celebrated, the Home Minister wrote back, "I was not in favour of any celebration on a large-scale But my friends and other young men held a different view, as they felt that birthday celebrations are not innovative They have been organized in the past also by other political personalities *For example, on 5 April this year, people celebrated the birthday of Mr Jagjivan Ram I do no know whether you or your advisers had sent a similar letter of protest that time If people attended in large numbers, they did so purely out of love and affection for me and their attendance was spontaneous*" (Italics mine)

Not to be left behind in the chorus of adulation were some of the Officers in the Press Information Bureau who had got trained in build-

[13]Frank Moraes, Indian Express, 28 September 1970

ing the personality of the famous lady for years To coincide with the "Kisan Rally," the PIB circulated a 16-page cyclostyled eulogy of Charan Singh—"The Crusader" This was not merely a bio-data of the Minister, which the PIB is quite within its right to circulate, whenever they please Instead, this was full of dialectical defence of the great personality "Shri Charan Singh had inevitably to incur the wrath of many left parties, when he was thus cutting the ground under their feet Their chagrin was understandable, because they had thrived generally by exploiting the miseries of the poor He, therefore, became the Communist Party's enemy Number One Even now, the epithet of a "kulak" is hurled against him by the Communist Party, little realizing that Shri Charan Singh had been recognized by the landlords as their uncompromising opponent Shri Charan Singh thus came to power at the centre, albeit an important member of a triumvirate "

If only the Prime Minister had not abolished the Republic Day awards, the officer would have merited, at least, a *Padma Shri*

In the forefront of the bandwagon, too, was one of the erstwhile "capitalist enemy," K K Birla, whose agents were spending hours and hours every day in the antechambers of the Home Minister, in a bid to placate him The powerful Birla organ, *Hindustan Times*, which had tirelessly showered encomiums on Sanjay Gandhi and the great lady, emblazoned a six-column blowup of the "Kisan Rally' on its front-page next morning, and not satisfied with one eulogistic piece on the Home Minister, it printed two mammoth pieces on the same page But Charan Singh, by all accounts, was proving a hard nut to crack!

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"Whoever controls UP controls India" has been the favourite thesis of Charan Singh He has made it to Delhi, but his hold on UP is maintained through remote control, and through his kith and kin A favourite saying in UP is that whoever controls the sugar industry of the state controls political power in Uttar Pradesh

A son-in-law of the Home Minister, who was a mere clerk when he married into the family, has had a special post created for himself—the post of the Deputy Cane Commissioner The Cane Commissioner has been reduced to a mere figurehead The Minister for Cane and Industries, happily, is Chandravati, a relative of Charan Singh, who had once wept for a seat in the Upper House The Deputy Minister for Cane and Industries, happily again, is a loyal Jat The all-important

man, however, is the Deputy Cane Commissioner allegedly acting as "conduit between the powerful sugar lobby and the ministry"

The eldest son-in-law of the Home Minister, an MLA of the Jana Party, has been given the prize post of the Chairman of Warehousin Corporation, with a fat salary, and all the perks a Cabinet Minister ca think of

The Deputy Cane Commissioner's wife, Saroj Verma, is a favouri daughter of Charan Singh, with overweening political ambitions her own She was nominated as a member of the State Welfare Boar but she suddenly decided that she wanted to be the Vice-Chairman the organization The Board has a budget of nearly 2 crores, and Vice-Chairman is in a position to distribute a lot of patronage all ov the state The young lady could have got elected to the post for t asking, but came a big hurdle in her way—Kamala Bahuguna, a Jana MP and wife of H N Bahuguna She was a nominee of the 3 Centr Welfare Board, and was attending the first meeting of the State Boar which was to elect the Vice-Chairman and the Treasurer

When Saroj Verma's name was proposed, Kamala Bahuguna p forth her objection Saroj was too young and inexperienced for the re ponsible job of Vice-Chairman Instead, she suggested the name Kamil Goendi, a former MLA, who had for long been associated wi the Kasturba Trust, and was a well-known figure in the state S had also been in jail during the Emergency

The proposal brought forth a terrible reaction from one section the Board members It was a furore Ultimately, two or three perso veered round to Kamala Bahuguna's view The infuriated young la rose to fight for her own case, "I am quite capable of becoming t Vice-Chairman I'll see who can stand in my way "

She was in a red hot temper, gesticulating, stamping her foot, thum ing the table

"There is no job I cannot handle," the young lady continued shout, backed by some of her supporters at the table "I'll accept not ing less than Vice-Chairmanship "

Ultimately, with great reluctance, she agreed to be the Treasur But she was still aflame with anger, determined to have her way soo or later

Amidst the one-hour battle that raged, some members were he telling one another—"This is the new Sanjayvaad!"

IV

Jagjivan Ram—"The Time Bomb"

THERE WASN'T a more frightened Central Minister during the Emergency than Jagjivan Ram The country's rumour-mill had it that he was under house arrest Technically, he wasn't He was still a Minister, and went about his routine job He also went to some functions now and then But all the time he was afraid even of his shadow

His antenna rose every time there was a visitor Most of them were sent back with one excuse or the other But there were some who could not be evaded One such visitor, during the early days of the Emergency, was an old political colleague from his home state, a friend with whom he had shared many of his earlier hopes and frustrations The moment he was ushered into Ram's presence, the visitor had started some plain speaking about Indira Gandhi and the Emergency "How can you tolerate " Ram cut him short, and got up from his sofa, trembling like an aspen leaf Cold sweat had broken all over him as he looked at the doors furtively, and said, "Come, come, we shall go out into the lawn " Out there, he told his friend, that he shouldn't have spoken like that Every nook and corner of the house, he thought, was bugged, all men around him were spies planted by the lady

One of the first things he had done after the Emergency was clamped was to take off his sparkling diamond rings, and put them into safe-keeping He had also made his wife take off the fabulous diamond bud she wore in her nose They had screened their rooms for any tell tale belongings, all of which were speedily removed But these were only normal precautions which many other politicians on the wrong side of the Big Sister had taken Precious stones and jewellery were

not reason enough for the kind of mortal funk that had taken hold of Ram

What was it about? What was the skeleton in his cupboard that had driven him to jitters? People who knew him closely were surprised that he had even stomached a sharp rebuff from Sanjay Gandhi He had not resigned in protest against the imposition of the Emergency, but nor had so many other colleagues of his who had equally been critical of the ways of Indira Gandhi and her son But why was Jagjivan Ram, in particular, chosen to move the Emergency Bill in Parliament? Why couldn't he refuse to do it when the measure was so much against his conscience? It was a common belief that Jagjivan Ram was being blackmailed, that the lady had a big handle to beat him into submission Nobody quite knew what the big handle was

Jagjivan Ram had earned the reputation of being one of the best administrators in the central government, but he had never had an enviable political or personal image At various points of time, during his long innings at the centre, scandals of one sort or the other had popped up, but astute and clever as he was, he had taken care not to leave foolish trails behind And, in any case, charges of corruption against politicians had started coming dozen a penny, and a few more here or there could hardly matter At best, she could drop him from her cabinet, and set up a commission of inquiry So what! Nothing to throw a veteran politician into a blue funk Even about his personal life, there could hardly be anything worse than had already been circulated by his one and only son Years ago, Suresh Kumar had gone about making unbelievable personal allegations against his father Time and again, he had even gone and told Jawaharlal Nehru, Morarji Desai, and other cabinet colleagues of his father What worse charges could anybody come up with now? He had already been charged and fined for not having filed his income-tax returns for ten years He had survived that merrily

There was obviously a much deeper fear that corroded Ram's mind It had perhaps to do with the relentless muck-rakers of the American Press who had gone about exposing the Nixon-Kissinger team for their policy of duplicity towards India during the Bangladesh War. In that process, the powerful searchlights of Jack Anderson and others had exposed the "crawling germs" in the Indian Government

"The fact was," wrote Jack Anderson, "that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had penetrated the Indian Government at every level, and these 'independent sources' sent a steady stream of reports back

to Washington on troop movements, logistics, strategy, and even some of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's secret conversations "[1]

The CIA operatives had gone about their job of bribing officials and garnering information with professional dispassion They had described some of their informants as "old and reliable sources"

On 8 December 1971, when the crisis was at a pitch, the CIA uncovered reports from a "source close to Mrs Gandhi" It was whispered deeply that India might launch a major offensive against West Pakistan

"According to a source who has access to information on activities in Prime Minister Gandhi's office," said one CIA report, "as soon as the situation in East Pakistan is 'settled', Indian forces will launch a major offensive against West Pakistan" The report went on to add —"The Indian Government hopes that all major fighting will be over by the end of December 1971"

Anderson had hinted darkly at the "CIA sources in the Indian Cabinet" Sometimes the CIA reports mentioned "top Indian officials" as their sources, but it was known that in American parlance even Ministers were "top officials" The CIA had been using sophisticated electronic equipment as well as "old fashioned bribes," and while sometimes, what they had to tell their command post in Washington, was similar to the news that the American reporters were sending back to their papers, some of their information was definitely exclusive, and seemed to come from somewhere right at the top of the Indian hierarchy

One CIA situation report said—" We have had several reports that India now intends not only to liberate East Bengal but also to straighten its borders in Kashmir, and to destroy West Pakistan's air and armoured forces To accomplish this, the Indian Army would transfer four to five divisions to the West as soon as it had gained control in the east initial movements of these forces have already begun "

Anderson revealed that on 13 December, "top Indian officials took up their fears of the fleet (Seventh Fleet) with Russian Ambassador Pegov He told them not to worry The CIA got a complete report on *the Russian's secret conversations with the Indians*"

Jagjivan Ram would be reluctant to admit it now, but his greatest fear to the last day was that Indira Gandhi would not hesitate to frame

[1]Jack Anderson, *Anderson Papers*

him as the principal CIA source during the crucial days of the Bangladesh War when he was the Defence Minister of India It is unbelievable that a patriot like Ram would have had anything to do with it, but Ram himself knew that there was nothing she would stop at, if she once decided to strike It would not be a mere imprisonment like the others She could decide to have him tried for "treason" against the country Perhaps a secret trial and liquidation thereafter

Following revelations by the American journalists, Indira Gandhi's secret service had got busy locating the possible sources of the CIA They got a pile of "circumstantial evidence" against a number of persons, enough to frame them if that was the lady's intention

All through the Bangladesh crisis, foreign correspondents swarmed the capital Naturally, one of their best sources, next only to the lady herself, was the Defence Minister Day after day, they had hovered around Jagjivan Ram Who could tell who was who in those crowds, and how each one of them was functioning?

If there is anything that Jagjivan Ram enjoys doing, it is to impress the Media He likes making a point, he likes taking credit for things, no less than Indira Gandhi does, and though he is known for his measured words, spoken with mathematical precision, he can overleap his mark in private, specially when he wants to impress To be able to impress a White man can be the highest of bliss for some of the masters of the land Whenever Jagjivan Ram makes one of his wise and cutting comments, he looks around for appreciation He always measures the response

All his wit and elan was gone during the Emergency He looked like a haunted man, driven by some unknown fear He had always been a remarkable speaker, specially in Hindi, but his speeches during the Emergency had nothing of the Jagjivan touch Nothing of the irony, nothing of the punch, nothing of the flight of fancy Dead pan face, dead speeches His championship of the famous 20-point programme in Parliament for once carried no conviction Nor did any of the other speeches delivered in praise of the lady They were command performances, and people having even an inkling of his private views could see that he was no longer his own master

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"Democracy has returned to India with a bang," wrote Martin Woollacott of the *Guardian* on 2 February 1977 For Ram, it was much more,

it was like a release from a very personal gas chamber But it was not the end of his fears He was careful about revealing his mind till the last moment

He had gone to see Indira Gandhi on the afternoon of 1 February 1977 He had sought for an audience himself Ram went to her exactly at 4 45 P M and, in the words of Indira Gandhi, took "exactly five minutes from the time he came out of the car and went back to it" He sat down, and told her, "If you lift the Emergency, it will add to your stature"

Indira Gandhi said, "This matter was looked into by the Home Ministry, and many provisions of the Emergency have already been relaxed The time has not come for fully lifting the Emergency"

To this, Ram said, "You should be able to deal with whatever situation that might arise with the normal powers"

Indira Gandhi told him, "I will take this matter up with the Home Minister"

That was all Next moment, Jagjivan Ram was gone He had not given Indira Gandhi the impression that he had "felt very strongly' about the matter

But there was little doubt that by the time he had sought this meeting with Indira Gandhi, Jagjivan Ram had made up his mind The sole purpose of this five-minute exercise was to cover up any doubts or suspicions that could have arisen in the lady's mind He did not want to take any chances before the deed was done

When he returned to his house, he put up a very indifferent mien towards his associates, H N Bahuguna, Nandini Satpathy and others Instead of talking any politics with them, he said, "I am very tired I would like to rest" His friends had gone away, rather perturbed by the change in Ram's attitude It seemed to them that he had struck a deal with the lady

Early next morning, the telephones of his political associates and Press correspondents based in Delhi, started buzzing They were called to 6 Krishna Menon Marg Ram had taken care to ensure that he left for the Rashtrapati Bhawan, to submit his resignation, in the presence of friends and Pressmen, just in case something went wrong at the last moment

He later explained his conduct of the previous evening to his friends, "I had full faith that you would not talk to anybody, but you never know Even walls have ears It was better to keep you in the dark than take a risk."

The secret manoeuvres had started several months earlier Like-minded people like H N Bahuguna and Nandini Satpathy had been increasingly appalled by the ways of Indira Gandhi, and specially the son's rise to power They were convinced that something had to be done Others, too, had started meeting Jagjivan Ram, but he had always kept up a sympathetic though non committal attitude ' It is for your people to see and understand what is happening It's for you to do what you think is right " He would seldom go beyond this

By the time the Gauhati Congress session was held, things had gone far enough Indira Gandhi had virtually hailed Sanjay Gandhi as her successor Her attacks on the Communists had sharpened All the adversaries of Indira Gandhi were in a restless state of mind, but could hardly dare any direct action

Came the announcement of the Lok Sabha elections, and the flood-gates seemed to open Ram Dhan, a Congress MP very close to Jagjivan Ram, who had been arrested and thrown out of the party along with Chandra Shekhar, came out of the jail, and became an active liaison between Ram and some of the Opposition leaders who soon declared the emergence of the Janata Party

During the Gauhati Congress session itself, Ram had been approached through some of his West Bengal contacts The conduit was usually his son, Suresh Kumar, who had been an MLA in Bihar, and was a politician of sorts After Nandini Satpathy was finally overthrown in Orissa, the secret manoeuvres gained momentum The moving spirit behind it was H N Bahuguna, who had been forced to quit the Chief Ministership in Uttar Pradesh They started approaching like-minded Congressmen in different states

What helped was the inner turmoil that raged in the Congress soon after the Lok Sabha elections were announced There were sharp divisions in every state, and the fighting children everywhere left it to their benign mother in Delhi to decide things for them The benign mother left things to her darling son, who was out to grab a minimum of 200 seats in the Lok Sabha, so that he could become the unquestioned heir to the throne

H N Bahuguna, Nandini Satpathy, and others saw that this was perhaps the last opportunity they could have to settle scores with the lady They went all out to plead with the Congress leaders of various states that this was the time to strike It was now or never An agreement was reached, and 23 January 1977, was fixed as the D Day, but the day passed, and nothing happened Many had got cold feet

Some of the Opposition leaders now turned to Jagjivan Ram H N Bahuguna was already working on him assiduously Biju Patnaik, Socialist leader, Surendra Mohan, Ram Dhan, Chandra Shekhar, and several others got in touch with Ram, and urged him to lead them

A shrewd, cautious man, Jagjivan Ram wanted to be assured first of the kind of support he would get "Who'll support me?" he asked the people who got in touch with him Biju Patnaik, Ram Dhan, and Chandra Shekhar assured him support on behalf of the Janata Party They even got word from the Jana Sangh leader, Nanaji Deshmukh Nandini Satpathy and K R Ganesh ran to their own links in the Ajoy Bhawan Yes, said the Communists "We shall support Jagjivan Ram" Armed with the promise, Nandini and Ganesh rushed back to Ram But he still wanted to think it over He would not commit himself in a rush

He got the news that nearly all his men in Bihar and other states were going to be denied tickets He was unsure about himself On 24 January 1977, Subhadra Joshi, a very old associate of Indira Gandhi, but with whom her relations had now soured, went to see Jagjivan Ram She pleaded with him that it was time to do something But what can be done? he had asked, and they had talked about the possibility of putting collective pressure on the lady He had remained non-committal

The "time bomb" had been set for the morning of 2 February 1977 It worked, but much as Jagjivan Ram, Bahuguna, and other had done their home-work, the Prime Ministership finally slipped out of their grasp

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"*Iss kambakht mulk men chamar kabhi Prime Minister nahi ho sakta hai*" (In this wretched country a cobbler can never become the Prime Minister), Jagjivan Ram had told his political friends one day

This was during the Uttar Pradesh elections of 1974, when the Congress was facing a concerted challenge from the Opposition parties There was a feeling among some Congressmen that Indira Gandhi did not want Jagjivan Ram to go for campaigning in UP, but those who had toured the state thought that Ram could be a great vote-getter, specially among the Harijans Subhadra Joshi and her colleague, D R Goel, met Jagjivan Ram to request him to campaign in UP

"Nobody wants me to go there," Ram said irascibly There was no need to ask what he meant by "nobody" The undercurrent of tension between him and Indira Gandhi was no secret

Even so, when Subhadra Joshi and Goel went to UP for the campaign, they arranged to have a formal "demand" sent to the AICC, saying that Jagjivan Ram should be sent to UP for a few days Though Indira Gandhi may have felt annoyed, she could not say no Ram went

While he was campaigning in eastern UP, he halted at the Gonda Inspection Bungalow for a night Subhadra Joshi, who had for long been trying to bring about an understanding between Indira Gandhi and Ram, thought this was a good opportunity to talk things over with him She went to meet him along with Goel and, in the course of talks, she broached the subject, and expressed her concern about the tension between the two leaders

"Who says there is tension?" Jagjivan Ram said "It is only Indiraji who feels there is tension between us I am quite straight Everybody who is in the government has a right to aspire for Prime Ministership " And then his deep resentment, perhaps at the accident of his birth, had welled up, "*Iss kambakht mulk men chamar* "

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Jagjivan Ram had come a long way From the benighted *Chamartoli* of a Bihar village to the front line at the centre was a remarkable journey It needed grit, determination, and talent and, above all, patronage and luck Ram had them all in good measure He had remained at the centre longer than any of his contemporaries, but he had set his sights high

For over two decades now, the Prime Ministership has been his loadstone Every time Jawaharlal Nehru talked of giving up the reins of office, a new hope welled up in Ram's heart There was never a leader more convinced about his own ability to make a great Prime Minister than Ram But for Nehru, the talk of retirement, whether in 1954 or in 1958, was always just a gimmick to get a tighter grip on the party and the government Several times, Ram had given indications of his vaulting ambition—enough to rouse the suspicion of the Nehrus, more the daughter's perhaps than the father's At one time when Jawaharlal was anxious to keep Morarji Desai from becoming the Deputy Leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party, he put up Jagjivan Ram as a contender for the post, hoping that this would make Desai back out on his own But when Desai decided to contest, Nehru adopted a different strategy altogether, thereby, denying both Desai and Ram the chance of becoming the Deputy Leader Ram had resented

it as much as Desai, and Nehru had no trouble realizing that Ram was not a wee bit less ambitious than Desai Out they both went under the Kamaraj Plan, the first serious move on the part of Nehru and his men to clear the hurdles in Indira's way

But there couldn't be a leader more adept at changing courses, and going with the wind than Jagjivan Ram He had as little concern for principles and ideologies as Indira Gandhi After Lal Bahadur Shastri's death, Ram was himself a candidate at one time, but when he found he stood no chance, he went over to Desai's camp, only to realize that he had committed an error of judgement He could see that the wind was in favour of Indira Gandhi, and once he was certain that she would win, he jumped to her side

After the general elections of 1967, the word got around that Jagjivan Ram might cross the floor with 50 of his supporters, and that the Opposition parties had offered him the Prime Ministership But Ram could see that it would be a dangerous move which could even cost him the Ministership, otherwise assured to him if he remained with Indira Gandhi He quickly backed out of the pow-wow with the Opposition

When he was confronted by a correspondent with the straight question whether he was going to cross the floor, Ram said, "Why should I? I foresee a better future for myself in the Congress itself"

In 1969, Ram became Indira's staunchest supporter, and functioned almost like her battering-ram against the Syndicate bosses Jagjivan Ram and Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed became the two charioteers of Indira when she set out on her journey to become the Empress of India "Ours is the true Congress, and we are the true Congressmen," was the battle-cry of the Ram-Ahmed team in those traumatic days of 1969 Midnight after midnight, they carried on their epistolary attacks against the then Congress President, S Nijalingappa, and were hailed as "Indira's towers of strength"

It was Jagjivan Ram who first evolved the famous concept of the right to vote "according to conscience," which eventually, led to the break-up of the party

Even at that point of time, when Ram was fighting her battle, Indira Gandhi was not free of her lurking suspicions against the ultimate intentions of her newly acquired champion To put him out of her way, and yet, have the support of his Harijan base, she proposed his name for the Presidentship But her proposal was defeated by the Congress Parliamentary Party, by a majority of four to two Morarji Desai was

one of those who had voted against Ram He had told Indira Gandhi that if a Harijan was to be selected for the high office, only two names could be considered—Jagjivan Ram and D Sanjivayya But Desai made it plain that he could not support Ram on account of his default in matters of income-tax and wealth tax How would it look to have as President of the country a person who had not paid his income-tax for ten years? "I was clearly of the opinion," wrote Desai, "that he (Jagjivan Ram) should not continue even in the ministry, and I had given an indication of this view in the discussion with the Prime Minister at the time of my talks with her'"[*]

When Indira Gandhi's move failed, she told her party colleagues irascibly, "You will have to face the consequences"

Jagjivan Ram became the President of the new Congress after the split, and made a thundering speech at the Bombay session in December 1969, in support of the Prime Minister, "*I have no doubt that when the dust of controversy has settled, the Prime Minister will be remembered by the present generation, as by posterity, as the initiator of democratically healthier traditions* " (Italics mine)

He was soon to know better She had no intentions of allowing any centre of power except her own, and Jagjivan Ram had no real intentions to be a servile President of the Congress Gradually, the lady was growing taller against the prop provided by her powerful Secretary, P N Haksar, and the radical slogans provided by her new found allies, the Communists, and fellow travellers The radicals around her were trying hard for a closer identification of the Congress with the so-called socialist forces in the country But Ram, who was consolidating his power in the organization, was proving a stumbling block to any programme-based understanding or electoral alliance with the leftist groups Indira Gandhi was under pressure from the leftists to assume the party Presidentship herself She herself was anxious to cut him down to size, and had started using her lieutenant, Lalit Narayan Mishra, to undermine Ram's position in his home state

She also used Mohan Dharia, one of the so-called Young Turks, to spearhead an attack against Ram Mohan Dharia demanded that Ram should quit the cabinet, while he was the Congress President He sent off a letter to Ram and the members of the Working Committee urging that "a President and his team wholly devoted to the job is a historical need' He put forth a number of "basic considerations" to prove why

[*]Morarji Desai, *The Story of My Life*

that the same persons ought not to be the President as well as a Minister "A President working in a subordinate position in the Central Cabinet shall never be able to play this role effectively," he argued At a requisitioned meeting of the Congress Parliamentary Party, Dharia continued his attack on Jagjivan Ram for keeping two posts Several members disapproved of Dharia's conduct, but Indira Gandhi did not express any opinion It seemed clear to all that Dharia had her approval

Ram, however, was not willing to budge from either position He was gradually assuming an aggressive posture, though not directly against Indira Gandhi He came out with a statement that the Congress must stick to the "middle-of-the-road" course, which was taken as a disapproval of Indira Gandhi's leanings towards the radicals

The tensions came into the open on the eve of the Lok Sabha elections of 1971, when the Bihar unit of the CPI accused Ram of having committed breach of electoral agreement in the state, and the latter hit back by saying that it was the Prime Minister who had negotiated with the CPI "through somebody," and he himself had, at no stage, negotiated with them "The Congress without its President has no authority to agree to any such arrangement," he told a Press conference, and went on to assert, "I am not a sleeping President"

When Ram's attention was drawn to a newspaper report that there would be no formal election of the Congress Parliamentary Party leader after the elections, he gave a cryptic reply, "Newspapers may say anything"

This was widely interpreted as a clear suggestion that the question of leadership was still open His statements had not come as a surprise to those who had followed his utterances during the election campaign

In a speech at Bhopal, Ram had deplored the fact that the Congress had to depend on the CPI-vote to survive the no-confidence motion in the dissolved Lok Sabha He made it clear that he did not want the CPI co-operation

This was in sharp contrast to what Indira Gandhi had gone about saying during her election speeches

Ram's anti-CPI utterances had suddenly brought him closer to his erstwhile colleagues in the other Congress "I agree with him about Communism," said Nijalingappa, the Congress (O) President "I also agree that he is not a sleeping President" In Lucknow, the then BKD President, Chaudhuri Charan Singh, also congratulated Ram

Political observers had no doubt about the real purpose of Ram's pronouncements He wanted to make it clear to Indira Gandhi that

he had no intention of stepping down from the party Presidentship, and that he would offer a challenge to her leadership

Before the Lok Sabha elections of 1971, very few had expected that Indira Gandhi would win the sort of landslide victory that she did Even some of the senior Congress leaders had calculated that the Congress would fall short of a majority, and had begun discussing their post-election strategy

Some time before the polls, a secret meeting was held at the residence of Jagjivan Ram It was attended by D P Mishra, H N Bahuguna, who was then the Congress General Secretary, and Uma Shankar Dixit They considered the "danger" of Indira Gandhi taking the CPI help to form a government, and decided that in that eventuality, they ought to be prepared for an alliance with the Congress(O) to form a government minus Indira Gandhi And so the strategy should be to give tickets, as far as possible, to people loyal to the Congress Party and not to Indira Gandhi

All their calculations went haywire Soon after her massive victory, Indira Gandhi, who had already talked about another "grand alliance" being formed against her, fixed her targets

Jagjivan Ram was stripped of the party Presidentship She did not even consider it necessary to get the approval of the Working Committee He had already been fined for evasion in a tax case Mercifully, she had included him in her cabinet Knowing him as she did, Indira Gandhi was sure he would take the Ministership, in spite of all the humiliation

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If there was anything that hurt Jagjivan Ram's pride, it was the widespread feeling that he had become a fixture in the central cabinet primarily because he was a Harijan leader It touched a sensitive chord somewhere deep in him

Very early in life, Jagjivan Ram had himself suffered the humiliations which the mere accident of birth brought to a man At school, two water pitchers were kept in separate corners, one for the Hindus, the other for the Muslims When some of the Hindu boys saw Jagjivan Ram taking water from their pitcher, they protested, and reported the matter to the Headmaster From that day, a separate pitcher was kept for the Untouchables Enraged by this invidious distinction, Jagjivan Ram broke the pitcher kept for him, and reported the Headmaster that the Hindu boys had done it out of malice A new pitcher was brought, but

again Jagjivan Ram did the same Disgusted with what he thought *was the mischief of the Hindu boys, the Headmaster ordered that Jag* jivan Ram would, henceforth, drink water from the Hindu pitcher Those who had any objection could make their own arrangement Ram had won his point, but he was not happy He felt that he was no more accept able to the Hindu boys than he was before

At the Banaras Hindu University, he could feel the undercurrent of antipathy towards him even more intensely It often seemed to him that the Hindu boys looked at him as an object of commiseration Nobody avoided him as such, and yet, he felt he was not accepted The hostel atmosphere got so stifling for him that he decided to live outside the campus And then one day, a barber who had been serving him for long, suddenly refused to shave him He had come to know that Jagjivan Ram was an "*achhut* "

In his own village, surprisingly, the Untouchables had been treated differently The village school where he learnt his alphabets was held in the verandah of a Brahmin Guru, Kapil Muni Tewari, who treated all the boys alike, whether they were Brahmins or Untouchables Tewari had taken a special liking for Jagjivan Ram When a heavy flood swept the village in 1923, and Ram's ancestral home collapsed, the whole family shifted to the house of Kapil Muni Tewari, and lived there till their home was rebuilt

Jagjivan Ram's father, Shobhi Ram, had begun life as an errand-boy in the military hospitals of Peshawar and Rawalpindi, where he had gone with a relative Shobhi Ram learnt Hindi and a smattering of "Tommy" English This helped him get a job in the British Army Hospital when he was just a boy of 12 At Multan, he came in contact with the follow ers of the "Shiv Narayani Sant" sect He became a "Sant "

Jagjivan Ram was barely 6 years old when his father died, but he still has faint recollections of his "sage-like father " In his later life, Shobhi *Ram had turned into a deeply religious person, "with the Savarnas' fetish* for personal cleanliness " He would never touch his meals without a bath, *havan*, and puja, and never forgot to perform *sandhya* in the evening After puja, he would take his "ektara," and sing some bhajans from Tulsidas, Sant Shiva Narayan, and Kabir

Whether it was the influence of his deeply religious father or the Brahmin household of Kapil Muni Tewari, Jagjivan Ram's life became geared, as it were, towards becoming a "Brahmin " Even today, his household is replete with Brahminical fetish, it is, in fact, an exaggerated simulation of a Brahmin household, an attempt to go one better than the

Brahmins A moment of joy for Jagjivan Ram is when a Brahmin touches his feet It's like a feeling of having arrived And yet not quite Deep within him lies a complex he cannot get over

Jagjivan Ram protested strongly when Mahatma Gandhi began calling the Untouchables as Harijans He thought that instead of bridging the gulf, it widened and perpetuated the separation He bitterly castigated the so-called humanitarianism of the caste Hindus, and said, 'They would, of course, feign to work for our amelioration so that their own interest did not suffer" At one point, Jagjivan Ram spoke highly in praise of Dr Ambedkar, the powerful spokesman of the depressed classes, who was at variance with the national movement

Gandhi wrote to Dr Rajendra Prasad to seek clarification from Jagjivan Ram Prasad told Ram that his aspersion on caste Hindus, his objection to the word "Harijan," and his praise of Ambedkar were "all very objectionable," and suggested that he might have written his speech in a hurry Jagjivan Ram accepted that he had written it in a hurry, and that he would have liked to qualify his remarks against caste Hindus, but he stuck to the rest of the speech

Ram had been propped up in the early thirties by Gandhi, Rajendra Prasad, and others as the "Congress answer to Ambedkar" There was a strong feeling at that point that the Congress was becoming somewhat isolated, with the Muslims and the depressed classes gravitating to other camps The Congress was anxious to show that it represented the entire national spectrum, the depressed classes, the Muslims, the Sikhs, and all the rest Jagjivan Ram had been picked up as the man who could be projected as the spokesman of the depressed classes in the Congress

When they decided to back him, one question arose—How to maintain him? The Birla House was asked to give Jagjivan Ram a monthly allowance Since that time, Ram has never been "disloyal" to the Birlas

But the moment he was picked up to be nursed and propped up, he began losing some of the fire that had raged in him Power and position came to him too easily He was soon engulfed by the razzle-dazzle of power It took such a hold over him and his family, that he could never extricate himself from it, not even when it was mere razzle-dazzle, and no power

When he became a Minister in the Interim Government at the centre in 1946, he went to Patna to bring his family Here is how his wife, Indrani Devi, described the excitement of those days—"He (Ram) would tell me, 'The bungalow in Delhi is very big It has a huge lawn' I would ask, 'Is the lawn as big as that in Bakshi Saheb's house?' He would

reply, 'No, much bigger than that' I would wonder what we would do with such a big house, and such big lawn But in the heart of my heart I was very happy At last, it was time to leave The policemen stood at attention I was too embarrassed to look up, he took the salute The station was also guarded by the police The onlookers were curious to know why so many policemen had come They were whispering to each other that they had come to present a guard of honour to my husband Laden with flowers and garlands, we entered the compartment. This, I was told, was a saloon I was meant for Ministers to travel in It had two or three bedrooms, one drawing room, toilet and kitchen also, where our food was being cooked I was suddenly reminded of my journey from Kanpur to Patna sometime back when I had spent the whole night sitting up in a packed third-class compartment with a sick Suresh (her son) in my lap, not finding a place even to stretch my legs And today, I was amidst a different scene I was too puzzled at God's ways "

Since that day, they never looked back They remained "champions" of the Untouchables, but it was a curse they themselves had left far behind Ram could do with making speeches against the social injustice, he could even indulge in occasional outbursts against the continuing atrocities on the Harijans, the continuing humiliations they suffered But he himself had acquired all the conservatism of the *Savaranas*—"a Brahmin among Untouchables," as a cynical old denizen of the *Chamartoli* in Chandwa described him

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It's an eye-opener Ram's birthplace Amidst the decrepit shanties and tumbledown huts of a typical Harijan bustee stands the mansion of Jagjivan Ram—a symbol of his great leadership of the down trodden It's like a transplant from one of New Delhi's posh colonies, the Golf Links, or the Maharanibagh, or what have you Once one is inside, one would forget what lies outside, one would be sealed against the "germs" crawling all around Only when one looks out of the windows, which one needn t, would one realize that one is in a strange world For, this mod 12 room bungalow stands right amidst the crumbling world of the benighted *chamars*, Gandhi's ' Children of God," who remain the wretched of the earth

The construction of the house was quite an event for the village Teams of builders had arrived with their tools and equipment at different points of time Surveyors, architects, masons, carpenters, electricians,

and decorators Most of them had come from the far-off "Rajdhani" They put up an attractive modern house, in the same place where the mud hut of Ram's had once been A marble plaque outside the house carries the legend

Guru Sant Pati
Sant Shobhi Ram
Ma Basanti Devi
Smriti Sadan

9 March, 1976

Chandwa, Arrah

"It becomes a *mela* when Babuji comes," said a poor neighbour of the great leader "There are rows of people in these streets, awaiting their turn to go in" The villagers made it sound as though the house were a temple, whose deity sometimes condescended to make a personal appearance And when that happened, the whole village turned up for a *darshan*

The poor folks of Chandwa, a medium-sized village on the outskirts of Arrah town, do not resent Jagjivan Ram's success or, at least, they try hard to show that they don't They would tell you how proud they are to have such a great man born amidst them

"Not a single lamp was lit in this part of the village," mumbled an old Harijan lady, "the day Jagjivan Babu did not become the Raja" What she meant was the day he failed to become the Prime Minister—24 March 1977 "No food was cooked in several homes"

But much as they praise and lionize Jagjivan Ram, once in a while, their pent up anguish wells up "Who cares how the poor live, Babu? When the floods come, we don't even get *chana*"

The comment came from an old cobbler sprawled beside the muddy lane that runs through the village What did he think of the big mansion next to his tattered hut? He gave no answer to the question, but the way he looked up at the canopied verandah of the double-storied house, and then turned his weary eyes away, there was hardly any need for words "It's an insult to the poor," his look seemed to say

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But what happens to the poor in Chandwa, or Belchi, or anywhere else matters little in the world of politics Nor does it matter very much if a leader's son goes about making unspeakable allegations against his

own father Nor even the fact that a leader turns filthy rich, as long he has the wisdom to leave no trails behind

What is required for a successful long innings in politics is a little oiliness, an infinite capacity for simulation, and double-talk, and a facade of altruism

If Indira Gandhi had a Sanjay in her home, Bansi Lal a Surinder Singh, and Morarji Desai a Kantilal, Jagjivan Ram had his Suresh Kumar If the father had grown up with complexes which he found hard to shed even after decades of privileged life, the son had no burdens of the past on his shoulders Though not exactly born with a silver spoon in his mouth, he had soon acquired one For years, he was wild as the west wind, who thought nothing of broadcasting the lurid stories of his home There was a time when Suresh Kumar became a festering sore for his father.

Much before he was bitten by the political bug, it was the money-bug that got hold of him An automobile agency in Bihar, in partnership with his Punjabi wife, and a *benami* agency in Maharashtra not only kept him busy but also brought in good dividends His wife's brother and sister were great favourites in the Ram house The brother-in-law was allegedly given the license to carry on inter state trade in foodgrains on behalf of the government during the time of a ban on private inter-state business It could have been a mere coincidence that Jagjivan Ram happened to be the Agriculture Minister at that time

When Suresh Kumar decided that he wanted to do politics, a seat in the Bihar Assembly was no problem A few eyebrows were raised, some comments were made, but these were inconsequential But Bihar was not really the place where Suresh's genius could thrive It was too small and slow moving

A correspondent, who visited Suresh Kumar some months after the Janata Government was formed, found him surrounded by Chief Ministers and Ministers They were all there for one favour or the other But Kumar told the reporter that he had nothing to do with politics any more "except that I am in this house "

"Never forget that Jagjivan Ram is a very shrewd politician," said an old Congress leader who has watched him ever since he became a central Minister in the Interim Government in 1946, at the age of 38 "He was the youngest in the team His only strength then was that he was a leader of the Harijans But he gradually made his mark But now, he is no longer a Harijan in any way, except when somebody commits the foolish mistake of washing a statue with *Gangajal* after he has unveiled it "

During his long years at the centre, Ram has held some of the "jui

ciest" portfolios—Railways, Defence, Agriculture, and several others "You don't know what a gold-mine these portfolios are In the Railways, they auction scrap iron now and then The mammoth heaps lie in different places in the country, but the auction is done in one place three crores, sometimes four crores If the contractor parts with 25 lakhs, he still makes a hundred per cent profit Everybody is happy This is just a minor instance Take Agriculture Lakhs of tons of food grains used to be imported Just for the contract to carry the food grains to different parts of the country, you get a cut of several lakhs In Defence, if you take only small items, there is a colossal scope They would buy *haldi* (turmeric) worth five lakh rupees or more at one go A lakh and a half is yours All very profitable "

"Ram is a very practical politician," emphasizes the old man 'In the 1971 elections, some Rajputs were out to get him defeated Ram allegedly spent a lakh of rupees to hire several hundred goondas, and put them all in jeeps That calmed the Rajputs down "

Ram is shrewd and astute And, above all, he knows when to explode

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H.N. Bahuguna—"Lovable Scamp"

"BAHUGUNA'S NAME betrays him," C B Gupta often said about the man who had for long been his principal gadfly A man of many tricks himself, Gupta thought Bahuguna had got the better of him The biggest shock of his life came when he lost his security deposit in the 1974 elections, and that too in the city of Lucknow which he had considered his personal fief He was convinced that Bahuguna had played some dirty trick on him

During the Lok Sabha elections of 1977, Bahuguna went to see Gupta The twists and turns of politics had thrown them together, and they were now fighting a common battle against Indira Gandhi The first question that the former patriarch of the UP Syndicate asked him was, "Tell me, Bahuguna, what did you do in 1974?"

It was a light-hearted question, but Bahuguna had blushed with embarrassment

"*Are bolo Natwarlal, ab to bolo kya kiya tha*" Gupta had jocularly nicknamed him "Natwarlal" of politics, after the renowned swindler who had duped the Indian Police for years

"Forget it now, Babuji," Bahuguna said, and switched on to other things

When the 1977 polling was over, and the ballot boxes were being kept in safe custody, Bahuguna showed particular care to ensure that the skylights of the room were properly sealed That brought the jaunty remark from Gupta, "Now I know from where my security got forfeited!"

Starting as a rough tough student leader in Allahabad University, Bahuguna had spent some rakish years as a trade union leader, and

slowly fought his way up through the jungle of cliquish politicians of the Gupta variety In the process he had mastered the Gupta art

He was a daredevil, adventurous politician who believed in the dictum of "no risk, no gain" and loved taking challenges When he was sent to Uttar Pradesh as the Chief Minister, only three months remained for the crucial Assembly elections of 1974, but he promised Indira Gandhi that he would ensure the party's victory The UP atmosphere had gone totally anti-Congress, and nobody expected the party to return to power, except the great optimist, H N Bahuguna

Arriving in Lucknow to a hero's welcome, Bahuguna had set up his war headquarters in the State Guest House, with his two personal aids—"one looking like a page-boy and the other a clown"—handling the war chest

Bahuguna himself had whirled round the state in a helicopter, showing intense capacity for wear and tear, landing in the remotest areas, addressing dozens of meetings every day He was a good speaker, and had mastered Dale Carnegie's prescription for winning friends and influencing people From his early days in politics, he had tried hard to fashion himself in the Nehru mould He had copied the same style of throwing his garlands at children, and posing for pictures with his arms round the poor and the deprived Wherever he went, he continued his game of hugging and kissing his Deputy Commissioners and Superintendents of Police, thereby ensuring their personal loyalties With the adroit use of his tricks, statecraft, and money power, he bagged for his party 213 of the 425 Assembly seats Three more seats were wangled through lathi-charge and repeated countings, as in Rae Bareli Later, defections swelled the number

Some described him as Gogia Pasha, the magician, and others as a 'lovable scamp" Even after he ceased to be the Chief Minister, he would make his presence felt during the Assembly sessions He would come waving at everybody through the Press gallery, dressed in immaculate churidar and kurta, his cap at a rakish angle with two streaks of hair deliberately kept out, which made him look like a "tabalchi" to some, and a film-hero to others Waving and smiling, he would walk over to the Treasury benches, and MLAs would rush towards him Some of his *shagird* would bend to touch his feet, and he would stop them halfway, embrace and pat them on their backs A few minutes there, and he would go out via the Governor's gallery, leaving the seeds for some commotion for the rest of the day

Even his enemies agreed that he had brought a new charm and halo

to the Chief Minister's seat He had gone about his job like a human dynamo, snubbing officials and politicians who were errant, and patronizing those who were his willing partners

Bahuguna believed in doing things in style He used a helicopter as a common man would use a bicycle His wife, Kamala Bahuguna, was once returning from a tour of Eastern Europe When she landed at Palam at 2 A M , she found to her pleasant surprise that her husband had been good enough to send her son, Vijay, along with a state helicopter to fly her to Lucknow in the early hours Waiting to receive the "first lady of the state" were the Resident Commissioner, and other high officials of UP

Bahuguna had grown too tall for Indira's liking

* * *

Don t send me to UP,' Bahuguna had told Indira Gandhi when she asked him to go as the Chief Minister "UP is a very big state If I do well, I will start looking tall, and if I do badly, I will look too small "

Indira Gandhi had chosen Bahuguna for the job very reluctantly The seeds of discord between them had been sown much before It had started with the well known "jeep scandal" of Sanjay Gandhi some months before the 1971 Lok Sabha elections The young boy who had started taking interest in politics had got hold of scores of brand new jeeps for the campaign, and parked them all in Dhirendra Brahmachari's Yoga Institute Sanjay Gandhi had slapped a Press photographer who wanted to take pictures of the jeeps, and a big story was printed in one of the Delhi newspapers Bahuguna, who was then the General Secretary of the AICC, suggested to Sanjay Gandhi that *he should say that the jeeps belonged to the Congress Party* That would save him from getting into a controversy But the boy took this as an interference in his affairs, and told Bahuguna to mind his own business

Later, when Bahuguna became the Minister of State for Commu nication, he drew up a new procedure for transfers and postings in the ministry Under this procedure, a large number of personnel were transferred One of them happened to be an Assistant Engineer having close links with Sanjay Gandhi Bahuguna was asked to cancel the transfer He refused, but sent his private secretary to Sanjay Gandhi to explain the procedure that had been laid down The boy didn't care for the procedure He wanted the transfer to be cancelled, no

matter what the rules When Bahuguna still refused to oblige, the Prime Minister's son was furious

Eventually, Bahuguna decided he would go himself and explain things to Sanjay Gandhi "I don't care what your rules are," the boy flared up "All I know is that this particular decision is wrong, and it must be changed"

Bahuguna lost his patience, and said, "Look here, Sanjay Gandhi, if I have done any wrong, I will resign"

The influence that the boy wielded on his mother was not so well known in those days, but Bahuguna did not fail to notice a sudden coldness in Indira Gandhi's behaviour towards him His political foes from UP, Chandrajit Yadav, B P Maurya, and others were on the ascendant in the court Gradually, Bahuguna was elbowed out from nearly all the committees of the Congress Party, including the one for the party journal, *Socialist India*, which had largely been Bahuguna's handiwork His enemies had dinned it into the ears of the Prime Minister that he was against her, that when he was the General Secretary, he had conspired with the then Congress President, Jagjivan Ram, to oust her from the leadership

But when Indira Gandhi was faced with the difficult situation in UP, she could think of nobody except Bahuguna who could deliver the goods Kamalapati Tripathi's "Bahu Raj" and the PAC revolt had left the UP administration in a shambles What was more, the elections were round the corner Among all the possible names discussed for Chief Ministership, she could not think of a better man than Bahuguna, as far as the job went. He had been the main organizer of the Lok Sabha elections of 1971, and she was well aware that Bahuguna knew the tricks of the trade better than anybody else Great at using people till it suited her, she decided to send him to UP

"Are you convinced that I am the right man for the job?" Bahuguna asked her

"If I wasn't convinced, why would I send you there?" she replied

He spoke of the "reservations" she had had about him, but she said, "Forget the old things"

But within a few days, Indira Gandhi had started regretting her decision She did not relish the reports about the thunderous welcome he had been given in Lucknow During his train journey from Delhi to Lucknow, Bahuguna was kept awake all night by thousands of "admirers" who thronged the railway stations all along the 300-mile route At several stations, the train had been held up for long periods

because of the large crowds wanting to greet the new leader of Uttar Pradesh At the Charbagh Station next morning, there were tumultuous scenes And two days later, when he assumed office, nearly a lakh of people gathered to hail him About half of them had come from various parts of the state "Hundreds of buses," said one newspaper report, "hired by Congressmen carried about 50,000 demonstrators to Lucknow to welcome H N Bahuguna"

All this could be right only if it was done for Indira Gandhi To make it worse, she was assiduously fed with stories about Bahuguna's soaring ambition He was reported as having boasted to a politician friend, 'If Biju Patnaik can collect a crore of rupees, and become the Chief Minister of Orissa, can't I collect a hundred crores, and become the Prime Minister of India?'

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Bahuguna, allegedly, proved an expert fund-raiser as Chief Minister UP was a great place for raising big purses for the birthdays of leaders C B Gupta never seemed to have had a birthday without a purse And when it came to raising a purse for Indira Gandhi's birthday, naturally it had to be a substantial amount It was said that Rs 75 lakhs were collected from the sugar barons of UP, but it was made out that the total collections were only Rs 45 lakhs Of this, 25 lakhs were supposedly spent on celebrating the Prime Minister's birthday all over the state, so that only Rs 20 lakhs reached the money pool at 1 Safdarjang Road

Yashpal Kapoor, the agent-in-chief of Indira Gandhi, had got the precise information about the total collection, and had dutifully informed his master He was told to keep a "close watch" on the goings-on in UP

Kapoor, with his "high connections" and knack of making friends, specially with people of his own sort, had established a line with the chief operator" of Bahuguna—one of his personal secretaries This man had been a clerk in the AICC office when Bahuguna was its all-powerful General Secretary The man had done a good turn to his master—he had married the girl he was asked to She, too, was a clerk in the same office, supposedly charming, and in trouble It was an 'obligation" for which he was fully compensated He became the biggest confidant of Bahuguna, and it proved a "mutually beneficial" partnership Within years, the man had a big mansion in Delhi, and

enough in his kitty to decide to go his own way, but that was only later when his links with Yashpal Kapoor got to be known

Kapoor started keeping tabs on the Bahuguna Government

Tenders were called for the construction of the Sharada Sahayak Gomati Jal Setu for Rs 4 20 crores, but the agreement was made for Rs 11 crores, which was further increased to Rs 14 crores No fresh tenders were considered necessary

When it came to a dispute with the Birlas over power dues amounting to Rs 4 crores, the government forgot its previous orders about pressing for the recovery of the dues, and went in for arbitration which was allegedly manipulated in such a way that the Birlas did not have to pay even the crore and a half they had been willing to pay earlier Several other industrialists like the Modis and the Singhanias whose factories had been subject to heavy power-cuts were only too willing to "do anything we are told" in return for a steady power supply

Strikes in the State Electricity Board had caused complete dislocation of power supply, and there was a virtual stampede for buying diesel pumping sets Suddenly, the government announced that only the firms licensed by the government could sell oil-engines to farmers, otherwise they would not be given loans Over one lakh oil-engines, worth about Rs 40 crores, were sold by the firms which had been "carefully chosen" to get government licences A huge pay-off was alleged

The Chief Minister's son, Vijay, who had just started practising as a lawyer in the Allahabad High Court, became the counsel for several dozen firms, with regular retainership Before his colleagues realized what was happening, the young lawyer was rolling in wealth

The then Administrator of the Allahabad Municipal Corporation got into a personal jam over his marriage to a foreign woman who had been married earlier to a doctor in the Corporation His troubles were over after he had got a huge house built for the young lawyer (The officer was reportedly suspended on charges of corruption under orders from Chaudhuri Charan Singh, after he became the Union Home Minister)

Behind all the "dynamism" of the government were the same familiar stories of greed and venality

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As a little boy in the Garhwal hills, Bahuguna's only ambition in life was to become an ICS officer He vividly remembers the day he was

going up a hill on a pony, with his father, a *patwari*, walking beside him From the opposite direction came a White Saheb on a horse, and his very sight sent his father into spasms of fear

"Get down, get down from the pony," he told his son, but the 10-year-old boy had stuck to his saddle

"He is not my Saheb," he told his frightened father

As the Saheb approached them, his father bowed and saluted him

The Saheb, who was an ICS officer and the Deputy Commissioner of the district, looked at the boy, and asked, "Rewati Nandan, who is this young man?"

"Sir, he is my son," his father muttered, still frightened

"What's your name, young man?" the Saheb asked the boy

"Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna," the boy replied boldly, totally upsetting his father by his boldness

It was only after the Saheb had ridden out of sight that his father regained his composure

Bahuguna had never seen his father so afraid of any man before, and decided that "the ICS must be the biggest thing in the world"

From that day, it became the driving passion of his life In all his school books he wrote, "H N Bahuguna, ICS"

The Bahugunas originally came from Bengal During the days of Aurangzeb, two Bandopadhyaya brothers had set out with their families for a pilgrimage to Badri Kedar On the return journey, the elder brother contracted hill diarrhoea and died The bereaved family had halted at Srinagar Pauri, the capital of the Tehri Garhwal State They were staying at an inn when they heard the beating of drums and an announcement being made The *panda* accompanying the families interpreted the announcement to them The Maharaja's son lay very ill, and it was being announced that if anybody could cure the prince he would be amply rewarded The Bandopadhyaya brothers were astrologers and Vaids The wife of the deceased brother persuaded her brother-in-law to go and see the prince He went to the Maharaja's court, saw the sick prince's horoscope, and gave some medicines The boy survived The Vaid told the Maharaja it was time for them to return home Full of gratitude, the Maharaja conferred on him the title of "Bahuguna" (man of many qualities), and pressed him to settle down in Garhwal He was given charge of the family deity, and made "Rajguru Dharmadhikari"

There are now nearly six hundred families of Bahugunas spread

over the hills of Garhwal In one of these was born Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna, in 1921

"I have been a migratory bird since childhood," says Bahuguna,[1] as he rushes through the story of his life "Up to the fourth class I studied in my village, Bughani, and then moved to a place called Khirsu I was a brilliant student, always first division I was very good at sports, too, but in the sixth class I broke my collar-bone while playing foot ball, and that was the end of it From Khirsu I moved to the DAV School at Pauri Garhwal, and then to Dehra Dun You see how I am slipping down the hill, always looking for pastures new wide horizons Because of this migration, every area claims me, and I claim every area My class-fellows are spread all over Uttar Pradesh"

His greatest ambition was to become an ICS officer, but his English was very weak, and so he put his heart and soul into improving his English When he was going home on a vacation, one of his friends gave him a copy of Pattabhi Sitaramaiyya's *History of Congress* He had no inclination to read about the Congress "One, who has nothing else to do, becomes a Congressman," he told his friend But his friend told him it was because of the good English of the book that he was giving it to him That was good reason for Bahuguna

"The ICS in me started reading the book But then I got to the chapter on Jallianwallah Bagh I still remember it was the Dussehra day My elder sister was waiting for me for puja, but I had lost myself in the story I later read it out to my sister She wept Those tears made me swear that I will uproot the Britishers from India The ICS in me was finished A rebel was born"

His politics started when he arrived in Allahabad The Principal of his college, an Englishman, would not allow a union anywhere near him, but he permitted them to have a "Parliament"

"We elected Vijay Vir Wanchoo as the Speaker I was the Prime Minister We were looking for someone to inaugurate our Parliament. Wanchoo said he could get his grandfather to inaugurate it And who is he? I asked him He said Jawaharlal Nehru I was thrilled Nehru has always been my hero I have tried to emulate his idiom, his dress, his ideas I shall admire, love, and cherish him all my life But anyway, we went to Jawaharlalji who happened to be in Allahabad He refused Said he was going on tour, but he suggested we could ask Ranjit Pandit to open our Parliament We went to him and he

[1] H N Bahuguna in an interview with the author

agreed"

That was the beginning of Bahuguna's association with the Swaraj Bhawan and the Anand Bhawan He started doing side jobs in the Swaraj Bhawan during his spare time, opening the dak, writing ad dresses, or whatever work that was given to him

In 1941, the Congress AICC session was held at Allahabad, and Bahuguna was made the "volunteer incharge of Maulana Azad" It was at this session that his father saw him, and knew for the first time what he was up to Bahuguna had started wearing khadi, but he had always kept a different set of clothes to wear when he went home

When he joined the university, he contested the election for the Union Presidentship, but lost "I started with a failure Then I be came a *dada*"—which is probably his word for a bully During the 1942 movement, he became the "second dictator" of the university, went underground, and "broke the nose of George V at the India Gate" He carried an award of Rs 5,000 on his head, dead or alive In Feb ruary 1943, he was arrested, and contracted pleurisy in the jail When he was released in 1945, he was a mere skeleton, and had a flowing beard

Until 1950, the doors of the District Congress Committee were closed to him The Allahabad Congress was in the stranglehold of Muzaffar Hasan, Mangla Prasad, and Masuria Din, all C B Gupta men who would not let him in Mangla Prasad complained to Govind Ballabh Pant, who was then the Chief Minister, that Bahuguna was a Communist, and tried to get him arrested Bahuguna had turned to the labour movement, and had organized nearly all the trade unions in Allahabad

Bahuguna describes with great flourish how he first rammed his way into the inner circles of the Congress leadership "In 1951, Jawaharlal Nehru became the Congress President The Socialists had walked out of the party, and the organization was in a shambles They were afraid even to hold a public meeting Lal Bahadur Shastri came to Allahabad, and sent word that I should see him When I met him, he asked if I could organize a meeting in the city I said, of course I orga nized the biggest procession in years Got all my trade unions to parti cipate in it The Tandon Park overflowed with people It was a huge meeting, but they didn't allow me to go on the dais I went to the far end of the crowd, and started eating *chaat* That was what I could usually afford in those days And then suddenly, it was all dark The lights had failed, and there was utter confusion A cry of 'Bahuguna

zindabad' rose from the crowd Everybody was shouting for me Nobody knew how to control the people I rushed to the dais, and the lights came back People shouted 'Bahuguna zindabad' "

It was all stage-managed by Bahuguna, his critics said Those were the days when he still had the reputation of being "basically a bully" with "underworld connections" According to an old citizen of Allahabad, at one time, "Bahuguna used to rent out rickshaws, and sometimes, drove one himself" But jealous critics can find fault with anything The fact was that the incident of that evening had given Bahuguna a special position in local politics Lal Bahadur Shastri had been deeply impressed by the young man's dynamism He became the favourite of Algu Rai Shastri, then the President of the UP Congress

Soon afterwards, Bahuguna got a letter from Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, informing him that Lal Bahadur Shastri wanted him to go to Himachal Pradesh to organize the elections there

"Parmar Saheb (former Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh) was my creation," Bahuguna tells you proudly

Impressed by his organizational skill, Jawaharlal Nehru gave him the Assembly ticket for the 1952 elections

Amidst all this struggle, there was romance, too Before going to jail, Bahuguna had fallen in love with Kamala, one of the three outgoing daughters of Professor R P Tripathi, Head of the Department of History, at Allahabad University To escape the police, he had often made Kamala's home his hideout They got married in 1946

In the hills of Garhwal, Bahuguna had left behind another wife, whom he had married when he was just a boy The story goes that when he became the Chief Minister, he one day flew to her village in his helicopter The lady of the hills happened to be ' busy cutting grass " She refused to see him

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Droll stories of liaison with a string of women are told and retold in the drawing rooms and offices in Delhi and Lucknow, till one begins wondering at the ingenuity of people's imagination or the libertarianism of men in power Stories about affairs with charming clerks in offices, salacious tales of women-teachers being interviewed in the Dak Bungalow of Nainital, reported connections with businessmen running vicedens in Hazratganj, unknown women suddenly popping up in the Assembly as MLA for no better reason than some "unknown favours"

they may have granted, all these are only part of the muck that continues to be thrown around

One name that often crops up in these conversations is of a lady-teacher in Haldwani Within a short time, a huge house had gone up for the lady, and her husband, a clerk, had acquired an industry of sorts, besides a truck and a bus, and a huge plot of personal land The lady had suddenly become an MLC, and had been sent on a junket to Sri Lanka And then she was a CFD candidate for the Assembly in 1977, with CFD leaders going all-out to get her elected, even at the cost of becoming tainted in the process

In spite of the Janata wave, she lost

Bahuguna's favourite was his Education Minister in UP, Ammar Rizvi An MLA once sought the permission of the Speaker to play in the House a tape which had recorded some tell tale voices The Speaker promised to give his permission the next day, but in the meantime, Ammar Rizvi allegedly threatened the Chief Minister that if he allowed the tape to be played in the House, he would expose him too The tape was never played

These are, perhaps, all in line with the Nehru traditions—with only some degeneration

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"I ll not show my face in Lucknow until I have got Bahuguna ousted," Yashpal Kapoor fumed at the Carlton Hotel after his client, K K. Birla, lost in the election to the Rajya Sabha He could not tolerate Bahuguna getting the better of him at a game he had mastered

Kapoor had arrived in Lucknow in March 1974, and parked himself in Chief Minister Bahuguna's official residence Sitting there, he had started his old game of buying legislators to vote for Birla Though an independent candidate, he had the blessings of Indira Gandhi Since Kapoor was operating from the Chief Minister's residence, people got the impression that Bahuguna was also backing the business tycoon He was away in Delhi When he returned to Lucknow, his secretaries told him what had been going on in the house, political manoeuvrings by day, and wild revelries by night Bahuguna was told of the strange women who had been seen going in and out He was wild What if he had shared many things with Kapoor in the past? Now he was the Chief Minister, a power in his own right, and he had to maintain

He ordered Kapoor's [illegible] moved to the Clarks Avadh [illegible] had arrived with his [illegible] at the [illegible] "gheraoed" by the supporters of [illegible] for the Rajya Sabha seat.

Kapoor sought Bahuguna's help for [illegible] win," he told the Chief Minister Bahuguna [illegible] herself tell me that " Three days before the [illegible] had issued a statement in Delhi, [illegible] politics through black money, and calling for a [illegible] Birla Yashpal Kapoor had little doubt [illegible] Delhi that day, had inspired the statement [illegible] vening in a discussion in the UP Assembly [illegible] two members of Chaudhuri Charan Singh's [illegible] by Bahuguna told the House that his party [illegible] Birla's candidature He even expressed [illegible] get a "shock "

"Power has gone to his head," [illegible] mer Hindi typist of the Teen Murti [illegible] Chief Ministers of many states He [illegible] defiance But Bahuguna saw himself [illegible] the Prime Minister "I had a basic [illegible] with later said 'I had even played cards [illegible] denly, her orderlies and clerks were [illegible] sud- couldn't take it I was against their [illegible] I just chery "

Indira had more trust in her "[illegible] debau- sending Bahuguna as the Chief Minister [illegible] after Reddy as the UP Governor in place of [illegible] Chenna had not even expired Bahuguna had [illegible] whose term cause of his good relations with [illegible] was done be- 'listening post" of her own, and [illegible] Gandhi wanted a she had 'set one trickster to spy on [illegible] observer put it,

The former leader of the Telengana [illegible] becoming a centre of power He ordered [illegible] was set on departments of the state and the [illegible] of the intelligence started issuing direct orders to some of [illegible] to him He even his arrival in Lucknow, Chenna Reddy [illegible] officials Soon after he would construct a temple dedicated [illegible] to the Press that premises Each brick of the temple [illegible] in the Raj Bhavan [illegible] after the [illegible]

of Vedic mantras

Bahuguna resisted the move, and told the Governor that this would be setting a "wrong precedent," because a Muslim Governor would *start constructing a mosque, and a Christian Governor a church* The temple project was scuttled, and Chenna Reddy was furious He became openly anti-Bahuguna, and would often tell Legislators who went to see him, "I know you are a Bahuguna man" He could hardly hide his contempt for the Chief Minister

"I know Bahuguna is trying to create a personal empire in the state," *the Governor told his visitors*

Efforts were also on to set the Pradesh Congress Committee against Bahuguna First, B N Kureel was made the President, but since he would not quarrel with Bahuguna, he was replaced by a "fighting type," Lakshmi Shankar Yadav, and still later, they planted Mohsina Kidwai Anti-Bahuguna tea parties became the fashion in Lucknow Now hosted by L S Yadav, and now by Lokpati Tripathi, son of the former "Tikadhari' Chief Minister, the parties were frequently attended by Yashpal Kapoor who was oath-bound to oust Bahuguna

But the dissidents got a temporary setback when Indira Gandhi invited the Bahugunas to a family get-together at the Anand Bhawan, Allahabad Some saw it as a reconciliation move, others thought it was no more than *Indira Gandhi's* usual tactics of keeping everybody guessing about her moves

The election case against Indira Gandhi gave the Bahuguna-baiters their biggest chance This man is a traitor, they said He is in league with the Judge Bahuguna was reported as having said at a party only a week before the judgement of 12 June 1975, "*Arre*, she's going for six years now *Kapoor charges me for finishing Indiraji through the* Judge—I'll finish Kapoor!"[1]

By then, Bahuguna imagined he had become too strong, in his own right, for anybody to do him any harm He thought he had built up an invincible power-base in Uttar Pradesh He had been a great hit with the Muslims at all levels, from the Nawabs and the Begums to the lowliest of them *He had a knack of speaking in Urdu, interspersed* with *Sher-o-Shaeri* which went very well with his Muslim audiences His critics say that as the Chief Minister he used to get Urdu speeches written for him by Muslim Officers in the Public Relations Department "He got them transcribed into Devnagri script, and mugged them

[1]Quoted by Uma Vasudev in *Two Faces of Indira Gandhi*

up," said one of Bahuguna's former officials Bahuguna was certainly capable of this kind of diligence During the days when he was out to improve his English to become an ICS officer, he claims to have translated the whole of Pattabhi Sitaramaiyya's voluminous *History of Congress* into Hindi, and back again into English He would then sit down to compare his work with the original

Whether mugged up or not, his mellifluous Urdu won him many admirers among the Muslims A great PR man that he was, he would go to the Muslim homes, and sit down to eat with them, and would never fail to participate in their ceremonies

He became such a hit among the Muslims that a charming Begum of Uttar Pradesh offered him a priceless ring, and when he once fell ill, the lady went about distributing alms to beggars for his fast recovery

A highlight of his Chief Ministership was the tremendous support he gave to the International Conference on Muslim Education which was hosted by Nadawa, a well known centre for training Muslim ulemas It was attended by some of the top religious and educational figures of the Muslim world, including the renowned Rector of the Al Azahar University of Cairo The hero of the show was H N Bahuguna, an instant success with everybody he met A former Director of the Palestinian Liberation Organization confided to a Lucknow journalist that the conference had been originally planned in Taiwan by certain agencies connected with the CIA

Bahuguna had not forgotten to build his pipelines with the outside world Aware of the importance of having a direct line with Soviet Russia, he had assiduously wooed the Russian Ambassador in Delhi Bahuguna invited the latter to Lucknow, and threw a big party for him The Russian envoy hailed Bahuguna as a great leader of the Indian people, and Russian officials were heard saying that Bahuguna was the 'future Prime Minister of India"

The "certificate" of the Russian envoy, and Bahuguna's enthusiastic participation in the Indo-Soviet Cultural Society jamboree also won for him the all-out support of the CPI leaders in Uttar Pradesh and elsewhere

But wise leaders never believe in putting all their eggs in one basket He always maintained a line with the Americans as well

His reputation of being a clever "political operator" only strengthened the suspicions of Indira Gandhi When Bahuguna was certain that he would be axed, he got jittery, and began approaching everybody

he thought could persuade Indira Gandhi to keep him on He tried Rajni Patel and Mohammad Yunus, but they were unable to help In despair, Bahuguna swallowed his pride, and went all the way to the Maruti factory to see Sanjay Gandhi, whose power he had realized by then But Sanjay Gandhi wouldn't see him He returned disappointed

Bahuguna stepped down gracefully Within hours, he shifted from the CM's official residence to a two-room apartment meant for legislators

A series of humiliations followed Delhi knew how well Bahuguna had patronized the Lucknow Press Instructions were immediately sent to the censors—"All stories on Bahuguna filed from Lucknow to be pre-censored Only factual information to be allowed" The media got the hint He was almost completely blacked out

The Allahabad District Congress Committee led by Kamala Bahuguna was dissolved Bahuguna himself was removed from the UP Congress Executive and the Congress Parliamentary Board

When his only daughter got married, most Congressmen found one excuse or the other to be absent They were afraid that if they participated in the wedding, they would incur the wrath of Sanjay Gandhi & Co Some people recalled the gala occasion when Bahuguna's son was married at Allahabad when he was in power Indira Gandhi and all the leading lights of the government had turned up for the wedding Business tycoons and sugar barons of UP had deputed their senior officers to look after the wedding arrangements Expensive gifts, including stone-studded necklaces, had allegedly poured in It hadbeen a wedding to remember By contrast, the daughter's marriage was a wash out

On the occasion of Kumbh Mela, Indira Gandhi visited Allahabad Bahuguna and his wife went to the airport to receive her, but she just went past them without even the sign of recognition in her eyes Everybody present had noticed the humiliation of the Bahugunas

In December 1976, one of Bahuguna's closest friends and supporters, Bachcha Pandey, was arrested under MISA for no palpable reason Bahuguna was then in Delhi When he heard of his friend's arrest, he burst into tears He was helpless There was nothing he could do Even so, when he returned to Lucknow, he met his successor, Narayan Dutt Tewari, and requested him to release his friend He got a polite no

In spite of all the humiliations, when Indira Gandhi announced the Lok Sabha elections, Bahuguna sent her a telegram congratulating her, and offering his services

On 20 January 1977, Bahuguna came to Delhi, and during the next week he tried "26 times" to have an interview with Indira Gandhi, but failed At last, he sent his wife, Kamala, to see the Prime Minister With great difficulty, she got to meet Indira Gandhi, but the reply she got was, "I will never see Bahuguna's face again"

That was the last straw for Bahuguna He finally decided it was all over between him and Indira Gandhi Then began his efforts to wean away Jagjivan Ram from the Congress He knew that the whole operation had to be carried out in absolute secrecy Cleverly, he managed to spread the word that he was lying ill in the UP Niwas Several doctors came and went, giving everybody the impression that Bahuguna was very ill At night, he would put on a crumpled dhoti and kurta, cover himself with a blanket, and start on his secret mission to 6 Krishna Menon Marg, the residence of Ram For days, he was busy as a beaver, working now on Jagjivan Ram, and now on his wife and son, Suresh Kumar In the same disguise, he would go off to the Jama Masjid to meet the Imam, who was to play an important role in winning the Muslims over to the CFD-Janata side

The Ram-Bahuguna axis, which Indira Gandhi had for long suspected, had finally come into the open But Jagjivan Ram, Bahuguna, and their associates were not prepared to throw themselves into the Janata Party which they considered a patchwork that could not last for long "Ours is the real Congress," Bahuguna asserted on 2 February 1977 The first statement which announced the birth of the Congress for Democracy was almost wholly his draft "We would like to reiterate" it said, "that our objective is the defence of the best traditions of the Indian National Congress"

Right until 1 May 1977, when Jagjivan Ram took the "unilateral decision" to merge the CFD with the Janata Party, Bahuguna had continued to maintain that the CFD ought to keep its separate entity The UP unit of the party, which best reflected Bahuguna's mind, had even passed a unanimous resolution against merger

Bahuguna fumed and fretted, but went along with Ram's decision It was, at best, a temporary compromise for him He was the "Odd Man In!"

VI

Raj Narain—"Akhara Politics"

THE CALL was from a most unexpected quarter Chaudhuri Charan Singh was both surprised and amused Raj Narain was a most unlikely person to telephone him in those days What was more, he sounded very different for a change, sweet and almost obsequious

"*Ap kab se mere khadim ho gaye*?" (Since when did you become my humble servant?) asked Charan Singh sarcastically "*Han, milna chahte hain to zaroor aiye, aapko kaun rok sakta hai*?" (Certainly, if you want to meet me you can come Who can stop you?) he added

It was surprising, to both Charan Singh and his party colleague who was with him Raj Narain and Charan Singh's *khadim*? That was news! For years, Raj Narain had been a Charan Singh-baiter It was he who had first debunked the BKD leader as "Chair Singh" How come the great drum beater of C B Gupta had suddenly changed colour? Then it occurred to them what Raj Narain's purpose could be The elections to the Rajya Sabha (1974) were approaching, and Raj Narain was pitted against a business tycoon, K K Birla, who had all the blessings of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and tons of money to buy Legislators with—and an operator like Yashpal Kapoor, to boot That must be it, thought Charan Singh

And so it was Raj Narain had been turned out in disgrace from the Socialist Party two years earlier, and all that his faction had been left with was its nuisance value Hanuman and Lakshman had always been the two ideals of Raj Narain Both *sevaks* He didn't believe in being his own leader He had started off as the greatest *sevak* of Lohia When he died, Raj Narain became the *sevak* of one of the greatest Lohia haters, C B Gupta, or as some maintain, he had built a pipeline with Gupta even while his great master was alive And now Gupta

himself had been worsted in the Assembly elections of 1974 The tiny man with the pace-setter inside him sat licking his wounds in his Pandariba house, wondering what trick the wily Bahuguna had played on him He was in no mood for any more politics, not at that point of time, in any case Nor was he in a mood to spend any money on Raj Narain Enough was enough Poor Raj Narain was badly in need of a new master, and to clutch at someone who was a Gupta-hater was just in line with his character So what if Charan Singh was a leader of the kulaks! Was Raj Narain himself any different? He could trace his lineage back to Balwant Singh, the founder of the Banaras Estate, and as for his Socialism, it had come and gone with Lohia "How has your Socialism emerged from the *Hanuman Chalisa?*" his friends had often needled him From his childhood, he had been an ardent student of his grandmother who made him memorize the *dohas* of *Tulsi Ramayana*, much before they could make any sense to him Later, at the feet of Ram Manohar Lohia, he had mugged up, parrot-like, all the anti-Nehru, anti-dynasty slogans of his guru They provided an excellent camouflage for his clandestine dealings with the Jaipurias and the Modis, and the wine-merchants of Mohan Nagar Raj Narain had finally made the right choice of a guru, for with the Prithvinath Seths and Mohan Singh Oberois already there, it was just the right team for him

Charan Singh, however, couldn't help being hesitant He could not forget that it was primarily on account of Raj Narain that his first Chief Ministership had gone up in the air Nor could he forget all the lampooning and lambasting that Raj Narain had done, day in and day out In a brochure he wrote on the eve of the mid term elections of 1969, Raj Narain said, " Shri Charan Singh had no difference of policy with the Congress His differences were personal We were regularly telling Charan Singh again and again that he should play Vibhishana to finish the Congress Ravana . he could not get away from his reactionary thinking and action because he had been a Minister in the Congress Government for about 20 years He started his dirty attempt to set the constituents of the SVD against one another Charan Singh also started collecting donations of big amounts "

Another brochure, written simultaneously by Raj Narain's friends, Arjun Singh Bhadoria and Ram Naresh Kushwaha, the then President and General Secretary respectively of the SSP, had gone for the BKD leader more directly—"We did not make Chaudhuri Charan Singh the Chief Minister because he was a good administrator and a honest

man. If anybody, instead of Charan Singh, would have got out of the Congress with 16 Legislators and joined the SVD, we would have made him the CM When Chaudhuri Saheb broke away from the Congress, he announced that the Congress is a group of dishonest people, but Chaudhuri Saheb's own conduct is clear from his activities He got a multimillionaire capitalist of Modi Nagar decorated with a *Padma Shri* He had been making a loud noise about prohibition in the name of Gandhiji, but the same Chaudhuri Charan Singh, in his tenure as the CM, encouraged liquor factory-owners He took lakhs of rupees for his party when he was the CM, and all this money is not deposited in the party fund Chaudhuri Saheb is no less than any Congressmen "

Charan Singh could not have forgotten all this tirade against him, but he could see that Raj Narain had merely been the cat's paw of C B Gupta, and now that he was ready to prostrate himself before him, why not use the man? Indira Gandhi and the Congress were the more immediate enemies. K K Birla's defeat would be a defeat for Indira Gandhi, and would please the BKD leader whose dreams of staging a comeback in UP had just been dashed in the Assembly elections He issued his *diktat* to his party to support Raj Narain for the Rajya Sabha He had won a *sevak*

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Some are born politicians, some become politicians, and some have politics thrust upon them Raj Narain is of the last variety He was the pride of his *akhara* (wrestling-pit) at Banaras, as he himself boasts even today, that if he had carried on with it, he would have become a "great wrestler" Towards the latter part of the thirties, Banaras had become the centre of student movements, and the Communists had emerged as a strong force The anti-Communist Congress leaders were on the lookout for a "student bully" with muscle-power Raj Narain, the *akharewala*, was a godsend He was made a leader, but he never got beyond seeing politics as anything but an extension of his wrestling ground Whether it was a *mazdoor andolan* or a *kisan andolan*, his style and tactics were of the *akhara*—"*dao, pech, langh, imukka*!"[1]

When Raj Narain went to the SSP convention at Sonepur (Bihar) in June 1970, he carried with him his own bunch of hoodlums led by a

[1]An old associate of Raj Narain in an interview with the author

former student leader of Lucknow University, Satya Dev Tripathi, now a member of the UP Ministry From Kanpur, a so-called labour leader having links with the underworld and the CIA, carried a busload of toughs to Sonepur to add to the lung-power and, if needed, muscle-power of Raj Narain who was waging a battle with his colleagues in the party. He had become an open champion of a Socialist sell-out to the Congress Organization, more precisely to his patron, C B Gupta Even as some of his colleagues were accusing him of having turned into an "agent" of Gupta, the rabble from UP stormed into the convention shouting, "*Jo Raj Narain se takraega chur chur ho jayega*" (Whoever clashes with Raj Narain will get smashed to bits) The main organizer of the convention was himself a mini-Raj Narain of Bihar, Bhola Prasad Singh, a man with many scandals behind him Hosting the convention was an ex-Zamindar-turned-ferry-contractor who ran a shady hotel on the side Well-wishers of the "Socialist movement" were naively asking, "What's gone wrong with the Socialists?"

Came the queer spectacle some months later—the winter session of the UP Assembly, 1970 The SSP, the Syndicate Congress, and the Jana Sangh, which had been in the Opposition in the earlier session, now sat on the Treasury benches along with the BKD The Syndicate member, Krishnanand Rai, who had never failed to accuse Charan Singh of being a "dishonest man and a liar," and the SSP's Anant Ram Jaiswal, who had always described him as an "enemy of democracy," now sat cosily with the BKD chieftain Charan Singh and C B Gupta looked as though they were old chums

These new partners were now putting before the House the same measures they had earlier called "undemocratic and dictatorial " And suddenly, Raj Narain, the "grandmaster of popular democratic movements," was lambasting his cronies of the Samajwadi Yuvjan Sabha for trying to agitate against the very same Universities (Amendment) Ordinance which he had described as a "black measure " He roared at the SYS leaders, Satya Dev Tripathi, Mukhtar Anis, Jitendra Agnihotri, and others, "You are agents of Indira Gandhi!"

One of the young men shouted back, "You are an agent of C B Gupta!"

Anybody who had looked beyond Raj Narain's Socialist *chola*, knew what was what What with his plane rides, and his obsession with the telephone, and his cronies in the *Darul Shafa* (Legislators' hostel in Lucknow), Raj Narain's average monthly expenses, even in those days, totted up to nothing less than Rs 10,000 Everybody knew that the

That he spun around in had been sent to him by Gupta The Syndicate leader had also promised him a couple of lakhs for the Raj Narain organ, the *Jan Mukh* Besides, the industrialists and wine-merchants and political supporters for whom he had allegedly wangled brewery licences and permits for a chain of cold storages, were for-ever bountiful "His regular retinue in the *Darul Shafa* included a cook, a couple of servants, a tough masseur, a Hindi typist, a Hindi draftsman, an English typist (yes, English!), and the regular hangers-on Add to this, a minimum of ten flights a month, three to four hundred litres of petrol, a thousand telephone calls, and a minimum of fifty trunk-calls a month Put that all together, and you will have some idea of his average expenses "[8]

Faced with the hostility of the SYS agitators, Raj Narain adopted a new stratagem He drew one of the boys out, and promised to make him the state SYS Chief if he could gather enough boys to outmanoeuvre the organizers of the demonstration The boy fell for the trap but he was unable to do much Raj Narain was afraid that if the demonstrators broke through the police cordon, and there was a lathi-charge, he would be totally discredited It was he who had forced the SSP's participation in the government All his justification for it was now at stake

He ran to the *Darul Shafa* gates, which open on the Vidhan Sabha Road As soon as the demonstrators got there, he stopped them, and said, "You have won Your objective has been fulfilled Get into the police trucks now" He approached the police officers on duty, and pleaded with them not to incite the boys "They will go in your trucks by themselves" He then stood there supervising the arrests It all seemed very farcical to Janeshwar Mishra who shouted, "*Ye demonstration hai ya nautanki?*" He wanted to make it a real Raj Narain-show, and lay flat on the roadside, resisting the police attempts to carry him into their van He had to be bodily lifted Raj Narain looked on happily He was content that the government, in which his party was participating, had allowed a peaceful demonstration!

The great debacle of the 1971 Lok Sabha elections threw the SSP into a flap Lohia, despite his flashy postures and stunts, could weave an assortment of facts and figures into something that looked like a profound policy But, after him, came his great mimic, Raj Narain—a mere stuntman Of the 93 seats in 17 states that the party contested

[8]A *Darul Shafa* neighbour of Raj Narain in an rview with the author

In 1971, it had won just three 60 candidates had lost their security deposits The party's polled votes had dropped from 72 lakhs in 1967 to 45 lakhs in 1971, and the percentage from 4 92 to 3 42 In Bihar, in spite of the SSP-backed United Front Government in the saddle, the polling percentage of the party had gone down from 18 to 7 per cent And in Raj Narain's own state, the drop was from 10 27 per cent to 3 7 per cent

The party General Secretary, George Fernandes, sent off a letter to Raj Narain asking him to pull out the SSP from the SVD Government in UP Raj Narain pooh-poohed it In Bihar, Karpoori Thakur stuck on to his Chief Ministership

The party's Patna convention in April became a *dangal* (wrestling match) Amidst the raging controversy, Fernandes called Pressmen to a side room, and accused the Raj Narain-Ramsewak Yadav faction of trying to perpetuate its hold on the party "by fraud, money, conspiracy, and manipulation "

Yadav, a confidant of Raj Narain, had been once picked up by Excise officials from a first-class compartment at Howrah Junction on the charge of carrying contraband drugs Several close relatives and friends of Raj Narain were on the list of operators active on the Indo-Nepal border One of the suspects, a former SSP worker of Gorakhpur, now adorns a cabinet post in UP A brother of Raj Narain, alleged to be a notorious bully of Banaras, was frequently seen at the Bihar-UP Excise checkpost through which enormous amounts of contraband items flow An Excise Inspector, who was suspended on the charge of *ganja* smuggling, had surprisingly close connections with Raj Narain It was perhaps because of his links with these men that he was repeatedly charged by his partymen for "complicity with *ganja*-smugglers " A preposterous accusation against a Lohia *bhakt*!

Much as the anti-Raj Narain faction of the SSP tried to browbeat him at the Patna convention, he once again emerged as the *dangal* champion His opponents knuckled under Raj Narain's unquestioned ability in "resource and crowd mobilization "

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"Oppose and agitate" was the only *guru-mantra* he had taken from his one-time master, Lohia To a follower keen on writing his biography, Raj Narain once dictated," Raj Narain never takes a holiday Come summer, come winter, he is always on the move His life revolves round

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*A *Darul Shafa* neighbour of Raj Narain in an rview with the author

midnight In the drawing room, the Magistrate waited and waited, while in the adjacent room, Raj Narain chatted with his friends When he finally emerged from the room, he roared, "Where's the order?"

The officer gave it to him He scanned through it wryly, and threw it back at the Magistrate "This order is no good any more," he announced, much to the bewilderment of the officer

"Why, Sir?" he asked humbly

"Why? Because your own order says that I am not to be allowed to enter Bihar Well, you see I've already come so far inside Bihar's territory, I've reached my friend's house here How can you extern me now? Your order is no good" Raj Narain, after all, was a Bachelor of Law from BHU! What if he had donned the lawyer's dress for just a day or two? "This order is no good, take Raj Narain's word for it," he told the befuddled officer Leaving the nonplussed man behind, Raj Narain disappeared inside for his dinner

When he returned to the drawing room an hour later, he found another hole in the externment order "This order is not even meant for me," he said, making the officer even more perplexed

"I don't understand you, Raj Narainji," he mumbled

"Read the order for yourself It is for 'Raj Narain of Varanasi' There must be hundreds of Raj Narains in Varanasi How can you prove it's for me?'

"Well, Sir, it is for you," the Magistrate said nervously

"Who says it's for me? I am not Raj Narain of Varanasi I am Raj Narain, Member of Parliament "

The puzzled officer took a close look at the paper and, indeed, he couldn't find anything to show conclusively that it was meant for Raj Narain, Member of Parliament

It was a journalist who intervened on behalf of the officer He said, "The officers in Bihar know only one Raj Narain—the Raj Narain who weighs three-and-a-half maunds!"

Amidst peals of laughter, Raj Narain took the order back, "for fresh consideration"

"*Lagao phone Charan Singh ko*," he called out to his host

When repeated diallings failed to get the Lucknow number of Charan Singh, Raj Narain bellowed, "*Governor ko phone lagao*"

They dialled the Raj Bhawan, but there was no response It was getting past one in the night Closer to two "*Indira ke gulam bhi waise hi hain*" (Even Indira's servants are like her), he remarked pugnaciously, and added, "*Phir lagao Chief Minister ko*"

events He creates events, rushes anywhere anything has happened, and out of every event, he tries to create another event "

Raj Narain never believes in going anywhere unless he can create a storm around himself Legislatures and Parliament are just other *akharas* for him to wrestle in On his maiden appearance in the UP Assembly in 1953, he stuck on a point during a debate, and kicked up such a shindy that a Marshal had to be called to drag him out It made news, and that encouraged him to make it his style for the future "It was a historic day," he says about his first day's antics in the Assembly "*4 March 1953—the day the fierce dictator of Russia, Stalin, died*" If anybody has the patience, he would run down the decades giving the "historic dates" of his great deeds, including the day and time when he took off the Gandhi cap from C B Gupta's head He is believed to be preserving the cap as a memento!

His big day came in September 1958, when he and his Socialist friends created a virtual riot in the UP Assembly, and helmeted policemen were called in to extricate them from the House He put all his three-and-a-half maunds on the floor, pushed and pulled, and wrestled till half-a-dozen policemen literally dragged him all the way out Halfway his kurta was in shreds, and by the time he was left on the tarmac outside, all he had on his body was a *langota* To the crowd of onlookers, he had looked like a heavyweight wrestler knocked flat in his *akhara*

When JP launched his agitation in Bihar, Raj Narain broke from the tether of his new master, Charan Singh, and raced to Patna He burst out of the Punjab Mail like a mini-tornado, giving bear-hugs to his party comrades, amidst loud guffaws and boisterous greetings But through it all, his sharp little eyes could not have missed the sombre, sedate faces of officials and policemen waiting on the sidelines He didn't pay them any attention, though, until an officer came forward to tell him there was an order to extern him from the state He was not to be ruffled, that was just the sort of situation he welcomed A new sparkle came into his eyes

"Where's the order?" he demanded pugnaciously

When the officer was unable to produce a written order, Raj Narain brushed him aside with his staff, and proceeded majestically towards the exit, his cronies scampering after him

A little later, the officers and policemen caught up with him at the residence of his friend, Bhola Prasad Singh This time, they had gone armed with a written externment order, but if they thought it would be easy to serve it on him, they didn't know Raj Narain It was almost

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

The Chief Minister, Abdul Ghafoor, was still up, perhaps somewhat high by that time of the night

"What does all this mean?" barked Raj Narain into the phone, with a wink at his cronies who were enjoying the whole thing hugely

After he had argued with Abdul Ghafoor for a while, Raj Narain said, "OK, OK, do as you please Krishna Ballabh Sahay (a former Chief Minister of Bihar) had also externed me from the state in 1967, and don't you forget what happened to him! You, too, will go the same way!"

In his characteristic nonchalant way, Abdul Ghafoor told him, "Well, everybody has to go some day"

Retorted Raj Narain, "That's true, but there is a difference between going soon and going later!"

He banged the phone, shouted, and bounced around the room But there was never any tension in the atmosphere It was all a midnight slapstick drama, and all Raj Narain was bothered about was a proper report in the papers next morning He was certain that in being bundled out of Bihar, as he was the next morning, he would achieve far more than he could by staying on to attend a lack-lustre meeting

During one of his agitations in Lucknow, the great showman is said to have made a prior arrangement with the police that four of them would carry him to their van so that the Press photographers could get a dramatic picture When the policemen lifted him, they found him so heavy that they dropped him with a thud After he had been dropped three times, he shot up, shouting, "I'll go to the van myself!"[3]

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He returned victorious from Rae Bareli more absurd than ever His stride was bouncier, his pronouncements gustier, and his antics cruder The giant-kille who claimed, with some reason, to have single-handedly changed the course of Indian history, jumped atop a car outside the Palam airport, and got going with his "Rajnaraimics" There has been such a surfeit of them that they no longer amuse, but in that euphoric hour with exultant slogans of "*Mummy mummy car gayi, car gayi sarkar gayi,*" anything that spouted from the steam-roller of Rae Bareli was lapped up From his high perch, waving his aluminium

[3]The version of Lucknow police officer

staff, he was quoting the *Vedas* and the *Koran*, the context not very clear to anybody "The Prophet of Islam says that the day you accept Islam you become a Musalman, no matter what you were before The *Gita* says the same " Perhaps it had something to do with their con version to the Janata Party Next, he was trying to get down, but the crowds wouldn't let him They wanted more of it, and he was only too willing to talk about how he had fought and worsted "Indira Nehru Gandhi" He went on and on, till he huffed and puffed, and sweated His shaggy beard was soaked with perspiration streaking down his face, and much to the delight of the crowd, he would often pull up his ankle-long kurta to wipe his forehead

For the next few days, he was lost in manoeuvres, in the custody of his former patron, C B Gupta, who would not leave him without extorting a price for all the good turn he had done him It was Gupta who had helped and financed him in his historic case against Indira Gandhi, it was he who had persuaded Shanti Bhushan to take up Raj Narain's case

The Prime Minister's selection over, Raj Narain rushed headlong to his great Samai Baba in the caves near Agra He had been wandering around Agra during the Lok Sabha election campaign when a friend had taken him to the Baba "I asked for his blessings The Baba closed his eyes for a while Suddenly, he picked up a garland of marigold, chanted some *mantras*, and gave me ten flowers Eat them, the Baba told me I ate all the flowers The Baba placed his hand on my head, and said, 'Fight the elections, and you will win' I know the reasons for my victory—devotion to Lord Shiva, my *tapa* in jail, and the *ashirvad* of Samai Baba" Raj Narain was rushing to the Baba again for advice and *diksha* "The Baba told me I must join the ministry, and gave me *peras*"

Next day, he went bouncing to the Ashoka Hall of the Rashtrapati Bhawan, a dozen cronies behind him He bowed to Morarji Desai, sitting grave and correct, and offered him a bit of the Samai *pera* The stickler for decorum took it with a you-can't-change-him-smile, and Raj Narain moved on to his other colleagues, all prim and proper for the solemn occasion If there was anybody showing that this was the end of the 30-year-old Congress Government, it was Raj Narain Before going up to the podium to take his oath, he stuffed a little *pera* into the mouth of the Acting President, B D Jatti

The antics of Raj Narain, the Minister, had begun "Family Planning? I hate that word It stinks of sterilization It is brutal You

castrate cattle, not men Change it to Family Welfare " His meetings with doctors and officers of his ministry were the stuff for farcical plays One of the numerous stories told from desk to desk in the ministry, and narrated by Ved Mehta for his American readers, ran

> Raj Narain summoned his top officials, and asked them, "On whose authority did you sterilize your brothers?"
> "Sir, you know who gave the order "
> 'Where is the order? Let me see it Where is the paper with the order?"
> "Sir, the order was never written down"
> He gave each one of the officers as tone, made his clerk stand in the middle of the room, and said, "Stone this clerk! I order you!" He shouted, "I order you to throw a stone at him and you don't move, but when she ordered you, you didn't hesitate to take a knife to your brothers "[4]

The Minister's house is a bedlam, at any hour of the day Bristling with pocket editions of Raj Narain, some lolling on the sofas, some on the floor, some snoring on a "takhtposh " The Minister himself loves "working" from his *chatai* on the floor, surrounded by his garlanded pantheon of gods, with Lohia sitting pretty amidst them Heaps of medicine scattered on the tables and racks The Minister in his loincloth, having his daily oil massage, doctors standing by in attention They are plied with questions, mostly on diabetes, which afflicts the Minister himself, and has put hateful curbs on his dietary habits Popping in and out of the room are the members of the "bachelor's den "

The 61-year-old Minister is not a bachelor Far from it He has a large family, but it is like his blind spot If someone asks him about his wife and children, he would make it out as though he were speaking about a past life "I don't know I have long been a *brahmachari* But I think my wife lives in Banaras I think one of my sons is in agriculture or something like that, one is in government service somewhere, and one is studying somewhere "[5]

The story goes that after he became a Minister, some of his sup-

[4]Raj Narain in an interview with Ved Mehta *The New Yorker* 17 October 1977

[5]*Ibid*

porters went, and fetched his wife from his village When he saw her he asked, "Who is she?"

When his amused admirers told him she was his wife, he said, "Oh, is she? Haven't seen her in years" And next moment, the "Netaji" was lost in his bigger "family"—the crowd around him

"For some, politics is a profession, for Raj Narain, it is his very existence," wrote one of his admirers

Family ties and normal human feelings about wife and children are alien to Raj Narain Years ago, he was amidst a meeting of the SSP in Lucknow when he was told there was a trunk-call for him from Banaras He went out to receive the call, and came back a little later The meeting went on as usual, but amidst it Lohia asked him whose telephone call it was Raj Narain told him it was just an information from Banaras that his eldest son had died Lohia was shocked at his casual manner of speaking He hurriedly passed a condolence resolution, and adjourned the meeting But Raj Narain didn't go home

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Raj Narain's concept of health and family welfare seemed to emerge from the same sources as his Socialism "*Swasth hi desh ke swasth ki kunji hai,*" he would start off, no matter whether he was speaking to a village crowd or an international gathering "*Samjhe? Kuchch nahi samjhe,*" he would add, *and then go on to cite the examples of Ram* and Krishna, and Mohammed to prove that "a small family was the best family "

Soon after becoming the Minister for Health and Family Welfare, he announced that the government would give a compensation of Rs 5,000 to every person who had been forcibly sterilized When he was told the implications of his announcement, he said, "What nonsense! If a rich man is killed in a plane accident, he is given a statutory compensation of one lakh, and when I am forcibly sterilized, I can't even get five thousand?"

Between his political manoeuvrings for his new master, Charan Singh, and his visits to Samai Baba, and other yogis and gurus, and tantriks, the Minister found time to enunciate his theories about "barefoot doctors," and the crying need for "sexual abstinence" He even carried the message abroad to Indians in London, giving them a taste of what a "Janata Minister" was like He tried hard to live down his reputation of being anti-English by telling them squarely "I have read

Shakespeare, Hilton, Milton, etc But what I cannot stand is that the British Raj is gone, but English is continuing I cannot understand why English should become the *rani* and Telegu the *dasi*!"

It was not Raj Narain's fault, if the Indians in London were often embarrassed and shocked by his words and behaviour It was not his fault, if they could not get over their nostalgia for Nehru and Menon, and Indian Ministers in Saville Row suits Raj Narain was only being what he was Time or place, or the nature of a gathering made no difference to him He didn't believe in changing his style and manners for the sake of form Used to delaying planes and trains in India, he felt quite at ease when he delayed an international flight at Kuwait, so that his aide could run back to the duty-free shop, and get him a transistor In his log-book, the Captain gave the reason for the delay as "traffic", the Kuwait Air India ascribed it to "VVIP!'

Apart from the tireless entertainment he had provided in India and abroad, Raj Narain had made, at least, one positive contribution as a Minister to the cause of India's *swasth*—he had donated his brain for research!

VII

Chandra Shekhar—The Ballia Radical

If JP had been a free-agent, and had the strength to assert himself, he would have chosen Chandra Shekhar as the first Janata Prime Minister

After the victory of the party in March 1977, Narayan had expressed his "inner desire" a couple of times, but only to some of his young confidants who were the friends of Chandra Shekhar It was JP's desire to give the government a "young new look," and not encumber it, from the very beginning, with old fogies who had outlived their time

JP had never been enamoured of Morarji Desai The reservations were mutual Not many years ago, Desai had described him as a "swinging pendulum that does not inspire confidence," and had insisted that JP became a fanatic anti-Communist "more out of disappointment and frustration than conviction "[1] These were comments which JP could not easily forget

JP had thought even less of Chaudhuri Charan Singh, and had wondered if his vision could ever go beyond his Jatland Charan Singh, on his part, had openly opposed JP's movement, and torpedoed the latter's attempts to form a united Opposition party JP could never reconcile himself to having Charan Singh as the Prime Minister

For the other man in the Janata triumvirate, Jagjivan Ram, JP had always had some soft corner Ram was one senior Minister of Indira who had desisted from making any personal attacks against JP during the Bihar movement In fact, his expressed admiration for JP's personality had only aggravated the suspicions in Indira's camp about his intentions All through his movement, JP had cherished the hope that

[1]Quoted by Welles Hangen in *After Nehru Who?*

Ram would openly defy Indira Gandhi, and come to his side But Ram had disappointed him by going along with Indira, even to the extent of loudly exhibiting his sycophancy to the lady

And so, JP was far from enthusiastic about any of the three stalwarts of the Janata Party But he could not bring himself to articulate his views openly He often praised Chandra Shekhar, an old PSP man, who had earned the image of a radical What was more, he was among the rare Congressmen who had defied Indira Gandhi, and warned her through his signed editorials in his journal, *Young Indian*, that all the power and might of her government could not defeat Narayan because his weapon was different He had spurned the bait that Indira Gandhi might make him a Minister, if he gave up his pro-JP posture Chandra Shekhar had not only gone to prison along with the Opposition leaders but had also rebuffed the efforts of Indira's emissaries to win him over after she had announced the Lok Sabha elections

With all this background, Chandra Shekhar had seemed closest to his idea of a "Janata PM" and, yet, JP could not speak out, except to people who did not matter A few young men, common hangers-on of JP and Chandra Shekhar, would have liked the old man to come out openly in support of the former "Young Turk," and felt positively irritated when he didn't They likened JP to an "old man who wants to have a pleasurable experience, but feels too embarrassed to ask for it"

Quite apart from his sense of delicacy, JP was aware of the storm his suggestion would raise He knew that the old leaders would immediately howl at him, and start fighting like Kilkenny cats That would be the end of the Janata Party Most of his associates of the Sarvodaya movement were pressing for Morarji Desai No longer in a physical or mental condition to resist pressure, JP plumped for Desai

But he was very keen on getting at least the Janata Presidentship for Chandra Shekhar, and had no hesitation in pushing him for it

In May 1976, when Narayan lay sick at the Jaslok Hospital and, later, in one of the guest houses of the newspaper-magnate, R N Goenka, dragging from one dialysis to another, he had wrestled as hard as he could with his plan to launch a new party "Who will be the President?" *some of his young followers had asked him, and JP had said*, "I want Chandra Shekhar "[2]

[2]Dayanand Sahay, newly elected member of Rajya Sabha, in an interview with the author A young businessman of Bihar, Sahay has been a camp-follower of both JP and Chandra Shekhar His wife is a Janata Minister of State in Bihar

Chandra Shekhar was still in prison, and they thought it would not be fair to announce his name without getting his consent Dayanand Sahay, who had already obtained permission to meet Chandra Shekhar in the jail, offered to go to Haryana and talk to him

When Sahay conveyed JP s proposal to Chandra Shekhar, he felt flattered, but said he did not believe that the Opposition parties would be able to combine Chandra Shekhar's Prison Diary was replete with his scepticism both about the possibility of the Opposition leaders coming together, and the viability of any such combination In his entry of 5 May 1976, he said, "It is futile to hope for anything much from the efforts now going to bring the Opposition parties together Not to speak of providing an alternative to the Congress, it is difficult for them even to work together With their pronounced egos, will they even listen to new people?"

"But I can t go back with a no, ' Dayanand Sahay told Chandra Shekhar "JP has sent me specially to get your consent It is his last wish "

"Well, if it is JP's last wish, there is no question of any discussion, there is no choice," said Chandra Shekhar

When Sahay came to Delhi, he thought he would meet Asoka Mehta and tell him about JP's proposal Mehta had been released from prison some days earlier When he heard about the plan for the new party, and Chandra Shekhar becoming its President, he looked positively hostile, and asked Sahay irascibly, "You people are making a President of a new party?"

Sahay said it was JP s idea, but Mehta flared up, and said, "Dayanand, you have a very bad control on the old man What sort of party can he make? A man who is dead for three days a week! A man who can't see beyond Bihar and UP! A man who cannot see beyond some Socialists!"[3]

Dayanand was taken aback by Mehta's reaction Chandra Shekhar had been an old associate of his in the PSP It was over the controversy of Mehta joining the Planning Commission that Chandra Shekhar had resigned from the PSP in 1964

Sahay went to Krishan Kant, an old comrade of Chandra Shekhar His reaction was no less intriguing Chandra Shekhar was still in jail and, apart from that, he may not be acceptable to everybody, Krishan Kant told him "Why not me?" he asked Dayanand

[3]Dayanand Sahay in an interview with the author

Krishan Kant went and met JP, and told him that he should post pone his idea of forming a new party for at least six months "It's important to create a following first Give me a list of all the Sarvodaya people in the country, and let me go round for six months Then we can form a new party" Dayanand and other followers of Chandra Shekhar flared up They told JP that Krishan Kant was only out to scuttle his move It looked to them as though even the friends of Chandra Shekhar were out to undercut him

JP's plan, in any case, remained still-born The BLD chieftain had seen to it that it was scuttled On 9 June 1976, came Charan Singh's statement asking his party not to participate in any Sangharsha Samiti movement. A few days later, he publicly criticised JP s announcement of a new party

Following the developments from his prison cell, Chandra Shekhar had tended to agree with Charan Singh that forming a new party, and talking about a movement were two things which could not be carried on at the same time A peaceful non-violent movement had no place in the country any more, he thought

In his diary, Chandra Shekhar wrote, "*Kaka (Charan Singh) ne bara uttam kiya Choon choon ka morabba yadi nahi bane to bara bhala Agar kahin ban kar sara, jo hoga hi, to ek musibat hogi Hamare jaise logon ke liye alag baithe rahna bhi muskil hoga aur insab ka saath to nibha pana asambhav jan parta hai*" (Uncle has done the right thing It's better if this hotch potch is not made If it rots after being made, as it is bound to, it will become a problem It will become difficult for people like us to stay out, and to be able to carry on with them seems impossible)

He was to get caught in just the predicament he had feared

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When Chandra Shekhar came to Delhi as a Rajya Sabha member in 1962, he was full of idealism He was taken aback by the life-style and preoccupations of most Ministers and MPs Whenever he went to parties or dinners at their homes, he was surprised that instead of talking about the problems of the country, the leaders were more interested in discussing the tapestry in their homes, the setting of their drawing-rooms, their equation with their secretaries and officials, and so on and so forth It seemed to him that the leaders had totally forgotten all about Gandhian values Instead of bringing about a change in the life-styles and behaviours of officials by living simple lives themselves, the politi

cians had started aping their ways On the one hand, they would pretend that they believed in making sacrifices, and took just a nominal remuneration as MPs or Ministers but, on the other hand, they would copy the life style of the affluent This was all utter hypocrisy, thought Chandra Shekhar in those days

It was a sort of culture-shock for him He had come from an entirely different milieu, with entirely different expectations From the school of Acharya Narendra Dev, he had landed in a very different world of Nehru, where politics had become just another service with various classes and grades of its own

Chandra Shekhar had no mind to join that rat race That was not what he had come into politics for After doing his MA in Political Science from Allahabad University, he had wanted to do research in BHU, and had even chosen the subject—"Influence of Economic Theories on Political Movement" But around that time, he had come in touch with the great Socialist leader, Acharya Narendra Dev, who told him, "What's the point in doing research, if the country itself is ruined? What will you do with your research?"

That changed the course of his life He became a whole-timer of the PSP in 1951 and, about a year later, he moved to his home-town, Ballia, as the General Secretary of the district PSP After the split in the party, he was sent to Lucknow, where he became the Joint Secretary of the UP Praja Socialist Party in 1954 and, later, the state party Secretary in 1957

His first personal contact with Jayaprakash Narayan was in 1951 when Shekhar started working as Secretary of the Allahabad City Socialist Party JP was a hero of youths in those days Chandra Shekhar was deeply impressed by his personality, but never became his blind follower In fact, when JP went over to the Sarvodaya movement, Shekhar was one of the most vehement critics of this decision It had seemed to him that JP had belied the expectations of the youths The man who had once been called the "lion of the underground" and the "Lenin of India" had suddenly cut himself adrift from the main currents of politics This had looked like a let-down, an escape from the realities of politics

In 1957, Chandra Shekhar fought the Lok Sabha elections, but lost It was not until five years later, that he was elected a PSP member of the Rajya Sabha Nehru was already on the wane, and was appealing to all "good Socialists" to join the Congress Chandra Shekhar was one of those who had felt a gnawing restlessness in the PSP The Socialist

movement had got badly divided, and there was little spark in its leadership The great divide between the stalwarts of the past and the pygmies of the present had afflicted the Socialists even earlier than the Congress Chandra Shekhar felt a growing sense of purposelessness being in a party which could have no role in shaping the future of the country His senior colleague, Asoka Mehta, had already gone too pro-Nehru Chandra Shekhar was not ready to go that far yet, and often criticised Mehta But, when it came to Mehta joining the Planning Commission as Deputy Chairman, and vehement protests rose in the party, Chandra Shekhar supported Mehta He was among those who believed that the country's planning should be an all party affair, and there was nothing wrong in a PSP man becoming the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission

When the PSP National Executive dissociated itself from Mehta's decision to join the Commission, and asked him to resign, Chandra Shekhar also quit the party

In January 1965, he finally graduated to the Congress Party There are many who say that he became one of the members of the "Back benchers' Club" along with Asoka Mehta, I K Gujral, Om Mehta, Raja Dinesh Singh, and others They all talked Socialism, but their sole objective was to project Indira Gandhi as the leader of the country Chandra Shekhar now vehemently denies having ever been a member of this "Club"

"I was, in fact, a great critic of this lobby," he says[4] "I thought they were just a wishy-washy group, talking in the air Once, some of them started saying that they should go round the country to mobilize the masses, for that was what Gandhi had done 'Who is Gandhi among you?' I had asked them, and that shut them up"

A little before Lal Bahadur Shastri's death, a meeting of this lobby took place in the house of Indira Gandhi Some of Chandra Shekhar's friends had been pressing him to meet her "You must have a talk with her, they told me I went to her place, and we talked alone for an hour I made it clear to her that I did not consider the party Socialist I would try to turn the Congress into a Socialist instrument or break it I had no love for the Congress as such"

Obviously, Chandra Shekhar was taking his idealism very seriously, far too seriously, in fact, for a party that would rather do without such encumbrances But, slowly and steadily, the process of "accommodation"

[4]Chandra Shekhar in an interview with the author

had begun Raja Dinesh Singh and Om Mehta, both cronies of the Nehru House, had become his greatest chums The razzle-dazzle of Delhi's high society was slowly making a dent on the young radical from Ballia, who had thought politics was nothing but deprivations and hardships He could see that his radical image and simple life-style were hurdles as well as assets for him He could sense the intellectual appeal that his image carried He would keep that up, no matter what else he did

Many were surprised when he was unanimously elected the Congress Parliamentary Party's Secretary in 1967 "The radical was doing well for himself," as one of his former PSP associates put it

It was a mere chance which brought him into the national focus as the "Angry Young Man" of the Congress Party At one of the meetings in the Planning Commission which he attended as a member of the Public Accounts Committee, Chandra Shekhar happened to hear an official making a reference to the Hazari Report on Industrial Licencing He was intrigued, and secured a copy of the report containing a detailed study of the Birla group of industries He submitted a series of memoranda to the Prime Minister and the Congress Parliamentary Party Executive, but nothing came of them

Chandra Shekhar had suddenly turned into a formidable critic of the Birla Empire There was a series of explosive confrontations in the Rajya Sabha between him and Morarji Desai, the then Finance Minister He was hailed by many as a "Young Turk" who was spearheading "a movement within the Congress to isolate the older leaders of the Right."

Chandra Shekhar had come to believe that he was a rebel against a society dominated by bureaucrats and big businessmen, but there were people who said he was merely acting as a shield of another industrial house in no way holier than the Birla group At the Faridabad session of the Congress in 1968, a young AICC member charged that Chandra Shekhar had been financed by the industrialist, S P Jain Chandra Shekhar's fellow-Young Turk, Mohan Dharia, protested loudly, and asked the Congress President, S Nijalingappa, not to allow the calumny any further But Nijalingappa ignored the objection, and said the AICC members were free to say what they wanted to

A furious Chandra Shekhar stalked into the room of Indira Gandhi, and told her that if the tirade was carried any further, he would expose Nijalingappa's own dealings with industrialists right there in the session "Indira Gandhi told me not to do it Kamaraj, who was there, also

tried to dissuade me from speaking out I was furious, and told them I would openly tell the session that they, too, were protecting Nijalingappa Kamaraj sent Ram Subhag Singh to Nijalingappa to ask him to get an apology from the member who had levelled the charge against me And then, Kamaraj himself reprimanded Nijalingappa Eventually, the member got up and apologized for the remarks he had made"

The storm blew over If the episode had proved anything, it was simply that leaders who themselves lived in glass houses could ill afford to have stones thrown at others Chandra Shekhar thought he had emerged triumphant He had certainly learnt how easy it was to be a radical hero in a crowd wallowing in hypocrisy and corruption

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Chandra Shekhar likes to draw a line between businessmen and friends who may happen to be in business He had lots of such friends who have hung around him, and made the best use of his "radicalism" One of these friends provides almost a rags-to-riches story

Until the early sixties, the man was just a servant in the shop of a bidi-manufacturer of Muzaffarnagar In a few years the agency failed, and there were charges that the man had embezzled a good sum of his master's money He started his own brand of bidis, and enterprising that he was, he often led an advertisement squad to popularize his stuff Soon, he rented a room near the house of a Congress MLA, and became chummy with him He had even picked up a smattering of astral-palmistry, which can be a tremendous asset for getting on with politicians The man got to see the palm of Banarasi Das, one of the closest lieutenants of C B Gupta, and some of his predictions turned out to be true That helped him get a bus-permit from the government in partnership with some others He then sold off his share for about Rs45,000 He had started dreaming of bigger things By then, his friends had moved into the world of politics, and were only too willing to help

The enterprising man started a rolling-mill in partnership with two bidi agents He collected over Rs 1 20 lakhs from partners, and managed a matching loan from the Department of Industries He took some more loan, and bought some scrap of iron from the blackmarket He had become the proprietor of a steel factory He took a trip to Calcutta, and purchased a Hungarian furnace lying as junk

The bidi maker-turned steel-magnate got his firm registered as a private limited company, and with the proper use of money and other

allurements, won over quite a few politicians to beat his drum Several Legislators and MPs had become obliged to him, and one or two were even on his monthly pay-roll

It was around this time that the "Young Turk" started promoting the man in a big way He was out to set up a mini steel plant in Ballia in the joint sector, involving an investment of over eight crore rupees A large number of Legislators were mobilized to campaign for the project, and with a "radical" at the back of it, the UP Government felt obliged to find some way of pushing the project through A high-level committee was set up, and it was ensured that the other contenders in the field were made to withdraw their applications for the project

The man had copied all the styles of big business operators He kept a suite of rooms at the Akbar Hotel, equipped with all possible items of entertainment That the man later joined the august company of Raunaq Singhs and V R Mohans as a Director of the Maruti Private Limited was only in line with his record But to be fair, Chandra Shekhar's friendship with the man dated back to the days when he was a mere bidi-maker in Muzaffarnagar

Another "friend" of the Chandra Shekhar & Co was a smart Sardar of Gorakhpur having alleged connections with the favourite trade of the Indo-Nepal border and links with a variety of other business, and was a journalist on the side A journal, whatever its worth, is often an excellent cover for other trades The Sardar kept an "open house" for his friends and patrons, almost a pleasure dome of sorts But to be fair, the Sardar's father was a saintly, god-fearing man

But enough is enough To go deeper into the "company" would reveal areas of darkness one would hate to enter

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All the while, Chandra Shekhar's public image of radicalism was getting sharper His tall, rugged build, and the beard helped He was quite a presence at parties and get-togethers, serious and meditative even amidst friends going wild and groggy with drinks He himself wouldn't touch drinks, which helped his image

He had had his major confrontation with Indira Gandhi at Simla in October 1971 when he won the election to the Central Election Committee in defiance of her whip Many proclaimed the victory as a revolt of the leftist elements in the party against the middle-of-the-road leadership What was not so widely known was the fact that Chandra Shekhar's

election had been fought from the posh hotel room of Raja Dinesh Singh who had been dropped like a hot potato by Indira, and was itching to show that he could fight her back Backing Chandra Shekhar were some other disgruntled partymen, including, at least two junior central Ministers and a Chief Minister, who wanted to convey it to the lady that they did not quite like the composition of her High Command

Radicalism has its own charms It's like a wine that goes to the head It generates its own pride and a feeling of exclusiveness A man with a radical image creates his own standards of success If his radicalism is genuine, a politician can wield such power that would make those in seats of power look small But if the radicalism is a mere imposition, a mere cloak, the power and the glory begin to wear thin And that can make him a pathetic sight Chandra Shekhar's journal, *Young Indian*, which was replete with radical editorial stuff, was an education for anybody who cared to delve into the nature and style of Indian politics and politicians Its issues mirrored the queer mix of radicalism and unscrupulous business Literally half the pages of its special numbers, of which there were always one too many, were full of advertisements from all manner of business houses and capitalist organizations, from the Dalmias and Nevatias down to the Rainbow Steels Limited of Muzaffarnagar Just one issue of the journal carried 274 pages of advertisements alone!

All this lent weight to charges that the "Young Turks" were thick with all manner of operators of the business and industrial world The motivations behind the attacks they launched in Parliament were often suspect It was alleged that the former Minister for Steel, Mohan Kumaramangalam, was attacked day in and day out, in Parliament and outside, just because he refused to allow the Bokaro steel plant to go to the Americans Stories are still told about the secret conclaves of the Congress radicals at Raja Dinesh Singh's house, after which they would move to Parliament, and ply Kumaramangalam with questions just to humiliate him for the ouster of Dastoor & Co from the Bokaro scene—because they had recommended the Americans to undertake the steel project

They were the radicals who failed the country

VIII

Atal Behari—"A New Nehru"

He sat, amused and smiling, as Prime Minister Desai delivered his homilies to the Indian students in Kiev "Don't drink cook your own food if the scholarship is not enough who told you to come? Pack up and go home "

As the young crowd emerged from the stern master's lecture, feeling stiff and bruised, they gathered round the Foreign Minister for a few words with him A little encouraged by Vajpayee's back-patting camaraderie, one student muttered, "In such a cold place like this, how can one do without a drop of something?" The Foreign Minister looked around, as though to make sure the master was not within his hearing distance, and then with a wink, told the boys, "*Piyo, piyo!*" With just a couple of words, he had established a rapport with the young scholars

At the Kremlin banquet in honour of the visiting Prime Minister, the Soviet boss, Brezhnev, went round greeting the guests When he came to a senior Indian journalist, he remarked with a warm handshake, "I am sorry your Prime Minister doesn't drink, but I hope you will make up for him!" He could as well have told this to Vajpayee who, undaunted by a weak stomach, had taken to the Russian table as a fish takes to water

With him in the South Block, the Indian diplomats round the world would have little cause for worry Asked by reporters in New Delhi if prohibition would be imposed even on the Indian Embassies, Vajpayee said with his characteristic wink, "Hope not!" The reporters came away saying, 'What a lovable guy!"

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Even the Communists seem to love Atal Behari Vajpayee

Talk to the intellectuals of the left, and they would go hammer and tongs at the RSS and the Jana Sangh, but when they come to Vajpayee, they turn milk and honey "But oh, Vajpayee is different He is a liberal, nothing of the Hindu fanaticism about him He is not trusted by the RSS" Short of claiming him as their man in the Jana Sangh, the Communists would shower their praise and blessings on him The more Vajpayee is baited, supposedly on behalf of the RSS hard core, the more he becomes a darling of the left

"If I hadn't come to the RSS, I would have been a Communist," Vajpayee once told Balraj Madhok, the latter claims Vajpayee became a member of the RSS in 1941, when he was only 15 years old, but he also became a member of the Indian National Congress (1942-43), and was associated with the Students' Federation in 1945

When he returned from a tour of Vietnam, Vajpayee paid high tributes to Ho Chi Minh for his successful leadership in guerrilla warfare, and described him as a "modern Shivaji"

From Moscow in September 1971, Vajpayee, the then President of the Jana Sangh, wrote an open letter to friends in Delhi telling them how utterly friendless India looked to him from abroad, and added, "Today, Soviet Russia is also in need of reliable friends If India can digest this fact, and mould its policy and strategy accordingly, we can use Soviet Russia for the attainment of our national objectives Will New Delhi be able to do so?"[1]

Vajpayee had been a great admirer of Jawaharlal Nehru, and had supported the basic concepts of his foreign policy In one of his first speeches in the Lok Sabha in 1957, Vajpayee had said that even if some other party had come to power instead of the Congress, and if there had been another Prime Minister in place of Nehru, the country would still have followed the policy of keeping out of the two power blocs, and of judging international issues on their merits He had made a great impact on the House with his maiden speech in which he made a remark which is still remembered, "One needed eloquence to speak, but both eloquence and restraint to remain silent" It was in the context of his criticism of India getting unnecessarily involved in international squabbles which did not affect it He thought it would be wiser not to meddle in every issue Deeply impressed with the new Opposition member's eloquence and ability to make his point, Jawaharlal Nehru

[1]*Motherland*, 3 October 1971

had got up to tell the House that he himself did not like to get involved in every world issue, but "what can I do? They don't let me alone!"

At a reception in the Indian Embassy in Washington, in the early sixties, Nehru had introduced Vajpayee to Dag Hammarskjoeld as 'India's blooming young parliamentarian"

"The sun has set!" Vajpayee said in his eloquent tribute to Nehru when he died He had described him as a thoroughly honest man and an idealist "who was never afraid to negotiate, and never negotiated with fear" The young Jana Sangh MP was so choked with emotion that he burst into tears

Even today, Vajpayee goes nostalgic when he talks about Nehru "He was a great leader," the Foreign Minister told an interviewer recently "He may have committed mistakes Who does not? But he gave dignity and sophistication to India's political life and culture, and enriched them ."

"Vajpayee himself is in many ways a carbon copy of Nehru," says the biggest Vajpayee-baiter, Subramaniam Swamy, Janata MP, who is believed to have the backing of the RSS hard core in his attacks on the Foreign Minister "Vajpayee is as wishy-washy as Nehru was I don't think he has any ideology"

This is not the first time that Vajpayee has found himself under attack from within his party He faced one of the most concerted attacks after Bangladesh War when he had hailed Indira Gandhi as the embodiment of Durga He had followed his eloquent praise in Parliament with a letter to Indira Gandhi, in which he said that if anybody ought to get the credit for the great victory in Bangladesh, it was she Indira Gandhi made the fullest use of this "certificate" from an Opposition leader, and she hardly had any visitor in those days who came back without being shown the letter from Vajpayee, the President of the party supposed to be her biggest enemy

At the Bhagalpur session of the Jana Sangh in 1972, some of the delegates raised a hue and cry against the manner in which the party President had praised Indira Gandhi They demanded that there should be a full debate on the question A closed-door meeting of the general council was called Before the deliberations started, Vajpayee said it would not be proper for him to preside over the meeting, since he was the subject of discussion before it He even insisted on getting down from the dais and sitting with other members on the ground The Vice-President, Dr Bhai Mahabir, was asked to preside At the end of the debate, Vajpayee said he agreed with the sentiments of the members, and

realized that his praise had done harm to the party "I had not realized that Indira Gandhi and her party would misuse my letter I was mistaken "

The new attack on him does not bother Vajpayee "It is the Janata Party's foreign policy that is to be pursued, and not the Jana Sangh's," he makes it plain to anybody drawing his attention to the criticism that he has done nothing but follow the footprints of Nehru

He makes it a point to remind people that even as the Jana Sangh President he had welcomed the Indo-Soviet friendship treaty He is aware of the several speeches he made in the past going counter to his *present pronouncements and postures After the Bangladesh War,* Vajpayee had wanted the Indian Government to sue Pakistan for adequate compensation for its aggression on India, and demanded a Nuremburg-type of trial of the war criminals responsible for the genocide in Bangladesh There are scores of other statements which would seem to be highly awkward for him today But he does not flinch at them Instead, every time he goes abroad, he dumps all such statements into the last sea or the last river he crosses

On his trip to Pakistan as the Foreign Minister, President Zia-ul Haq is said to have confronted him with a bunch of old statements that Vajpayee had made on Pakistan With disarming candour, Vajpayee told Haq, "I have forgotten my past I hope you have forgotten yours " The wall between the two leaders broke

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For a man so well known for his happy-go-lucky, almost tramp-like habits, Vajpayee brought an amazing suavity and sophistication to his South Block job Numerous stories are told about his uninhibited be-

[illegible]

squatting on a footpath of Delhi, gulping away *go guppas* [illegible] -
chewala

A journalist one day found the Jana Sangh President *standing outside* his Ferozeshah Road house waiting for a taxi He had to go to a meeting at the Vithal Bhai Patel House Rather hesitantly, the correspondent offered to give him a lift on his scooter pillion He felt certain that the leader would make some excuse Instead, Vajpayee jumped *on to the* pillion, delighted at the opportunity Even as the Foreign Minister, Vajpayee was one day seen sitting on the ground with the crowd

at the Ramlila Maidan, while leaders of the Janata Party made their speeches from the high pavilion

It's not a put-on pose for Vajpayee He is a simple, fun-loving man without any pretensions He is the type who would prefer a hearty meal standing in the *Parothewali Gali* in Delhi to a five-course dinner at the Oberoi Intercontinental

Vajpayee often says that his biggest mistake was to come into politics He would much rather have gone for some scholarly pursuit He had inherited a literary bent of mind from his father, an Inspector of Schools in Uttar Pradesh When his father retired from the service, he decided to join the law classes with his son The father and son not only attended the same classes but also lived in the same hostel room at Kanpur

Because he could write good poetry in his student days, or so Vajpayee claims, he got a job as the Editor of a monthly called *Rashtradharm* He not only did the editorial writing, composing, and proof reading but also filled the pages of the journal with his prose and poetry pieces He later became the Editor of *Panchjanya*, a Jana Sangh weekly, which was then brought out from Lucknow, and for about a year, edited *Veer Arjun*, a Delhi newspaper of the party

For a time, he served as private secretary to Dr Shyama Prasad Mookerjee who founded the Jana Sangh in 1951 It was not until 1957, when he was first elected to the Lok Sabha, that Vajpayee became politically known He soon made a mark both as a parliamentarian and public speaker With his poetic turn of phrases, a charming lisp of tongue, and a natural histrionic ability, he could sway his audiences

When the party President, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, was murdered in February 1968, the Jana Sangh was hard put to find a successor Nanaji Deshmukh, who had made a name as a dynamic party organizer, said they must find somebody having the makings of a charismatic leader The only name that came to their minds was Atal Behari Vajpayee He was only 42 years old, but there was nobody comparable to him in the party as a mass leader

When the idea was put across to Vajpayee, he broke into tears [3] "You *want me to take the place of Deen Dayalji ? I am no match for the job*" But he was persuaded to take it, and he lived up to the responsibility

There was a snag, though Vajpayee was not the one to feel comfortable in the strait-jacket that the discipline-loving RSS leaders sought

[3] J P Mathur, a Janata Party leader (formely of the Jana Sangh) in an interview with the author

› impose on him The free bird in him felt stifled Never a thought riented organization, the main thrust of the RSS was on maintaining strict watch on the character and discipline of its flock, and no matter ow high you rose in the Jana Sangh hierarchy, you had to toe the RSS ne, keep to the narrow path Drinks and women were specially taboo

Rightly or wrongly, several reports about Vajpayee's way of life had ained circulation Many of them emanated from the RSS and Jana angh sources themselves Balraj Madhok says that many party mem ers had brought all manner of complaints about Vajpayee's personal fe, but he had told them it was not fair "to first raise a leader to a high edestal, and then pull him down with scandals"

... RSS trying to domi

nly using Vajpayee's "vulnerability" to keep him under their thumb hey could not afford to lose him, he was about their only mass leader ... The detractors of Vaj- ... "Some of the ... ee) in 30 Dr ajinder Prasad Road, New Delhi, have been *spreading* all kinds of scan- als about his private life One of them brought certain scandalous sto *es to the notice of Professor Madhok also as early as 1968* As an der and senior member of the party, Professor Madhok advised that *inctionary not to spread that kind of stories about Vajpayee* "[3]

Talking about Vajpayee now, Madhok refers one to the book, and adds, *You should see the recent article in the Onlooker* magazine If any- iing, the facts there are underplayed!"

A few lines in the article, which the Vajpayee-baiters seem particu- rly delighted about, make rather an innocuous reading—"One Mrs aul, a portly middle-aged lady, whose husband reportedly lives on the elhi University campus, has by now come to be accepted as a part of *tal Behari Vajpayee's* household "[4]

The facts are somewhat misplaced The husband of the lady is very *uch a fixture of the Vajpayee household* himself The Kauls are very ... made of their living with ... s points of time,

[3]*Jana Sangh, RSS and Balraj Madhok* by Mangaram Varshney
[4]*Onlooker*, 1-14 December 1977

A lady journalist from a Delhi weekly who covered a day in the Foreign Minister's life, gave this description of the breakfast scene at 7 Safdarjang Road—" He eats absent mindedly, as if preoccupied with the foreign affairs of the country He was served a carelessly fried egg and two toasts—all clustered in a quarter plate The Foreign Minister had just started eating when a lap-dog strode into the room, and found his place near his master's feet Mr Vajpayee indulgently fed him pieces of toast, and watched him eat, quite forgetting about his breakfast 'He is the watch in this house He wakes all of us in the morning, and after the entire household is up, goes off to sleep himself', laughed Vajpayee Wondering who the household comprised (since Vajpayee is a bachelor), I tried to concentrate on Vajpayee's object of attention who had by now comfortably settled on the dining table

We realized that Mr Vajpayee was well looked after by his family friends —the Kauls Mr Kaul, an elderly gentleman, was engrossed in his news paper as he sipped his bed tea Then suddenly, a young girl, in her early twenties, stormed into the room with a very cheerful and loud 'Good Morning' The daughter of the Kauls, with her enthusiasm, her high spirits, and her capacity for endless talk, seemed to have taken after her uncle Tea was brought in by Mrs Kaul She struck us as friendly, hospitable, and warm, but reluctant to take any steps without 'Atalji's' permission Later during the day, in one of our friendlier chats with her, she told us about the long-term association her family had with Mr Vajpayee, and also revealed that she and Mr Vajpayee were in college together She showed us some rare photographs of Mr Vajpayee from the family album, but refused to part with them One felt an uncomfortable tinge of sympathy for Mrs Kaul as she narrated the hard times they had faced through the years Trying her best to fight back tears, she recalled all that Mr Vajpayee had gone through during his political career, and how the Kauls had lived with it Back at the breakfast table, Miss Kaul amused Mr Vajpayee and her father with her lively sense of humour, and her talents as a mimic In fact, she outshone Mr Vajpayee

She would think nothing of pulling his leg and, with a wink, reeled off her uncle's 'beauty conscious' traits, 'He loves perfumes, and creams, and takes so o o long to get ready', she went on mercilessly, while Mr Vajpayee emphatically denied all allegations "

Though a bachelor, Vajpayee would seem to have a perfectly happy family around him If you ask his carping critics what's wrong in living with a friend's family, they would say—"It's very Kashmiri!"

Jealousy and meanness are the last things one would associate with an open, warm-hearted man like Vajpayee, but these are just what his former party colleague, Subramaniam Swamy, accuses him of "Mr Vajpayee has many good qualities," says the former Harvard Professor, "but he suffers from a deep sense of insecurity about anybody having a *growth rate higher than his Petty jealousy consumes him like a passion* "[8]

Himself a controversial MP, who has been described as the "Raj Narain of Jana Sangh," Swamy accuses Vajpayee of having "maliciously and deliberately" scuttled his trip to Peking, which even the Prime Minister had cleared "But Vajpayee *threw a tantrum The Indian* Embassy in Peking had sent him word that I would be given a big welcome as an anti-Soviet fighter Vajpayee suddenly saw visions of my pictures with the great Chinese leaders He is incapable of tolerating any publicity for anybody else Ironically, I was brought up in politics because of him It was he who made me a member of the Jana Sangh Working Committee overnight, and proposed my name for the Rajya Sabha I had been his fan Well, I had liked him, but he started *feeling that I was becoming very important He is susceptible to* flattery, and does not like blunt-speakers "

A blunt speaker if there is any, Swamy charged that when he was underground during the Emergency, Vajpayee had wanted him to surrender to the government He was also sore that Vajpayee had manoeuvred him out of "my natural constituency—Delhi" during the Lok Sabha elections of 1977 "When he could not get my name cancelled by any other means, he became a candidate from Delhi himself And in Bombay, they saw to it that I was given just the constituency which I had not wanted, a constituency which was half slums, bristling with Shiv Sena, and mostly anti-South "

The last straw for him, said Swamy, was when Vajpayee asked for his expulsion from the Janata Party in October 1977 "There can be no black and white assessment of *Vajpayee If he is friendly to you, he is a* delightful man But he cannot tolerate a rival He is a great pretender "

What came as a greater blow to Subramaniam Swamy was Nanaji Deshmukh telling people that what Swamy said was his own business, and had nothing to do with him "I was stunned for three days," says *Swami "The second blow came during the Janata Parliamentary Party* elections, when Nanaji tried to get me defeated The worst part was

[8]Subramaniam Swamy in an interview with the author

that I had been told I will be one of their (Jana Sangh group's) candidates And then, I was calmly told to withdraw That is the standard procedure to devalue people All right, I'll fight you, I said I fought and won, and that too on first preference votes "

What Swami seemed to grudge was that even Nanaji Deshmukh, whom he had considered to be on his side, had gone along with Vajpayee

"Don't you run away with the idea," say those in a position to know the mind of the Nagpur bosses of the RSS, "that Vajpayee is in confrontation with the RSS When it comes to a crunch, he has always gone with the RSS"

It is pointed out that when Prime Minister Desai made a statement saying that his Ministers should not go to any RSS functions, Vajpayee promptly made it clear that he felt free to go anywhere he chose to Even during the days of the Emergency when the Opposition leaders were holding talks for merger, and some BLD leaders had raised the question of the "double membership" of the Jana Sangh leaders, Vajpayee had sent a letter to his colleague, J P Mathur, asking him to make it clear to all that he would not join any party which would object to his having relations with the RSS

There are some who even consider Vajpayee's liberal romanticism a studied facade to win greater acceptability for the Jana Sangh group which was only the political arm of the RSS

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The man who has really helped gain a greater respectability for the Jana Sangh constituent of the Janata Party without ever projecting himself is Lal Krishna Advani, by far the cleanest and straightest leader in Indian politics today Clean, sophisticated, business-like, mild-looking, but firm when needed, the Minister for Information & Broadcasting is almost a freak in today's political world Though never in the forefront, he stands bright as a candle of hope in an otherwise dark prospect Some have described Vajpayee as a "desert flower" The epithet fits Advani more

A year younger than Vajpayee, Advani (b 8 November 1927) joined the National Executive of the Jana Sangh for the first time in 1967, became the party's General Secretary a year later, and succeeded Vajpayee as the party President in 1973

Born in Sind (Hyderabad), he came to India after the partition, and took his law degree from Bombay He became an RSS *Pracharak*, and

chose Rajasthan as his field of activity While looking after the legislative wing of the Rajasthan Jana Sangh, he also wrote for the *Organiser*, and came to Delhi in 1960 as the Assistant Editor of the journal It was here that he came in touch with Deen Dayal Upadhyaya who immediately saw the potential of this quiet and devoted party-worker Drafting resolutions was Advani's forte A man of mathematical precision, he would never use a word in a hurry he may have to regret it at leisure

A matter-of fact, persuasive man, he realized the limitations of the Jana Sangh as a political party Where others were starry-eyed optimists, dreaming of a take-over of the government by the Jana Sangh all by itself, Advani could see that with all the prejudices and stigmas attached to the party in the public mind, it had reached the optimum point It would have to change its strategy if it wanted to go any further The Jana Sangh was the last to realize that without a merger of the Opposition parties, the Congress could not be ousted

For years, the party was deeply divided between those who were for a merger and those who thought it should go it alone, come what may It was Advani who provided the meeting-ground for the two by advocating a phased-out movement towards a merger A sudden merger, he argued, would be too traumatic for the party to bear He was for a "court ship before marriage " Came the experiment of Janata candidates, and then the strategy of Janata Morcha in Gujarat, both of which were largely the results of his initiative

Advani is perhaps the only Janata Minister who has not considered it necessary to move out of his modest flat, which he occupied as a Rajya Sabha member Impeccably clean and honest in personal and public life, he is a despair for anybody who may choose to pick on him If there is a negative side to him as a politician, it is his lack of personal ambition, for power seldom comes to a man who does not run after it headlong Advani, it would seem, is not cut out for that sort of rat race After a long hard day's work, he would much rather spend a few quiet hours with his little family Or perhaps, read or play a few tunes on his *bansuri*, or better still, take a quiet corner in some theatre!

IX

The Janata Menagerie

IT WAS quite a "hall of fame" Heading the bizarre team was the hawk-like Gandhian who had once been described variously as "Genghiz Khan in khadi," and the "*Sarvochch Neta,*" and more simply, just "Morarji" A man with nine lives, of which only five had gone, he had made it to his goal at 81 He didn't care if his government fell on *Nashabandi*, he was proclaiming to the world That would be falling for a noble cause! He didn't care if he faced a storm over his views on Sikkim—those were the Prime Minister's "personal views!" He was content to go on as long as he could, *statusquoism* was enough

Waiting, with growing impatience, for the apple to fall, were the two stalwarts of the "Janata *trimurti*"—Charan Singh and Jagjivan Ram, their swords pointed at each other The "Kulak Chief' all set on his "Road to Gandhi," for ever grumbling that the townsfolk were not giving him his due He had once considered Meerut his *jagir*, he was now set to establish his sway over the rest of the country, fair weather or foul Smouldering with an inner fire, tolerating the "painful period of transition' was Jagjivan Ram, the man who "opens his mouth when—and only when—he thinks that he should throw the gauntlet" He had used his Harijan base to bargain with others, and become a "cabinet fixture" for well over three decades As one American writer put it, "anyone who knows how New York City slates are drawn up to include at least one Jew, one Irish Catholic, and one Italian can understand why Jagjivan Ram is still in Delhi" That was in 1963 A good 15 years later, he is still there, pushing hard for the throne that has eluded him again and again over the years

And then a whole gallery of patriots rabble-rousers, turncoats,

dissidents, and clowns "Pop comedy, morality, burlesque, pantomime, agitprop, happening—there is fare to suit every taste "[1] One year after the fall of Indira Gandhi, comes the report from Rae Bareli—"Mr Raj Narain asks for a glass of water at an official lunch He is promptly offered three glasses of water, plus a glass of orange juice by officials bending over in supplication "[2]

Another day, you have the Minister for Health and Family Welfare holding forth to a crowd of UP Ministers and Legislators at the Lucknow airport—"So the Ministers have started buying and selling shares? I'll set them right!" He fumes away at the UP Government's decision to buy the shares of the Swadeshi Polytex to help the Swadeshi Cotton Mill of Kanpur tide over its crisis He must protect the interest of his friend, Sitaram Jaipuria, no matter what happens to the Swadeshi Mill "Where is that Chief Minister of yours?" he roars, thumping his aluminium staff "Tell him, I'll have all his Ministers dropped if they don't behave"

When he is not protecting the interests of his business friends, the court jester is boosting the image of his new master, Charan Singh, defending him against attacks in Parliament, and spearheading attacks against his rivals and detractors Whether it is a charge of nepotism against the Home Minister or a charge of his being anti-Harijan, Raj Narain is immediately up in arms "Nobody can hold a candle to Chaudhuri Charan Singh who has dedicated his life to the uplift of Harijans and other backward classes," he proclaims in Parliament "Whenever he hears of atrocities on Harijans, Mr Charan Singh loses a good night's sleep "

If an attack has to be mounted against Jagjivan Ram or H N Bahuguna or Chandra Shekhar, Raj Narain is always there like a faithful Sancho Panza And yet, the poor man is not really trusted at the chieftain's court There are other contenders for the first place besides the powerful Home Minister, the King to-be There is the other great Lohia *bhakt* and a so called stormy petrel of the Socialist Party, Madhu Limaye, dividing his time between propitiating Charan Singh and baiting the RSS

Suddenly, one evening, Madhu Limaye turned up at the house of Charan Singh with a big parcel ' What is that?" asked Charan Singh with his characteristic suspicion

[1]Sham Lal in *Times of India*, 17 May 1977
[2]*Indian Express*, 23 March 1978

"O, it's just a stereo-player," said Limaye, unpacking it

The Home Minister, who has never had time in his life for such fripperies like listening to a radio or watching a TV, called his family members to have a look at the contraption

"How much does this thing cost?" he asked, but Limaye wouldn't say anything

"Must be at least Rs 3,000," interjected one of the family members

Charan Singh was taken aback "How did you manage to spend so much money on this?" he asked Limaye "It would have to be inquired into," he added with a smile

But Limaye was a little flustered He thought there was need to explain "I keep writing articles now and then The money I saved "

"But why have you brought this to me?" asked the Janata patriarch

"Oh, I was so deeply touched by the Kisan Rally today," said Limaye, "that I thought I must bring you this little gift as a token of my regard on your birthday In your moments of political stress, this might give you some peace . "

There are ways and ways of propitiating a leader Who could tell what might please him? Surely, the calm, soft-spoken Shyam Nandan Mishra, a former camp-follower of Morarji, and now jockeying for Charan Singh's favour, must have found his own way of pleasing the Chief His veiled attacks against the "Kanti caucus" has earned him plaudits in the Home Minister's camp, but as one close observer of the political scene put it, Mishra "will have to give more positive proof of his loyalties "

Nothing had changed The same old faces, the same old style The same group of social climbers, the same manner of group operations

The "Janata" was just a misnomer It was basically the same old Congress under a different label Morarji Desai, Charan Singh, Jagjivan Ram, H N Bahuguna, Chandra Shekhar, Mohan Dharia, Biju Patnaik—they were all chips of the same old Congress block It was, in a way, like going back to the days of the pre-1969 split, if one did not take into account the few Socialists and the Jana Sangh Dividing the big new combine was the shadow of Nehru There were the former Congressmen who thought the past 30 years had been a total waste for the country, there were the others who swore by Nehru waking and sleeping Charan Singh, who had himself been part of the Congress for a good 20 years after Independence, thought nothing of debunking the 30-year heritage, but many others flinched every time Nehru was attacked Even the former Jana Sangh leader, Vajpayee, had cast himself

in the Nehru mould, and made no bones about his great admiration for him

It was a queer muddle Some baiting Nehru, others praising him, some talking about the commanding heights of the public sector, and others brashly championing the Japanese and American models, some asserting the need for heavy industries, others clamouring for a "return to the villages," some talking hoarse against monopoly houses, and others against multinational corporation and, yet, none of them was in practice doing anything other than what was being done in the last 30 years The same double-talk and hypocrisy prevailed in action

But Morarji Desai sits pretty at his *charkha*, asserting that in "ten years India will be the happiest country in the world"

"You really believe that?" asked Ved Mehta[5]

"Yes, I do This is my intense belief"

"How can you hope to make even an impression on Indian poverty?"

"Why not?" Desai said impatiently, and then added as an afterthought, "I don't want to be first in the world in per capita income I don't want the affluence of the West for India Like Gandhiji, I only want good life for every Indian"

"And you really think that this is possible in the next ten or whatever number of years?"

"It's certainly possible in the next ten years, or why would I be sitting here? We have in India the resources, the intelligence, the capacity for hard work and, above all, we have faith I may see God in this life, or in the next life, or in several lives It's all in the hands of God"

When the New York-based writer asked Desai how the disparate elements of his party could work together, Desai said, "They have now all accepted the Gandhian philosophy"

Indeed, they all or, in any case, the front rank leaders of the Janata Party began their term with a pledge at the Raj Ghat, a pledge to "promote national unity and harmony by working together in a spirit of dedication, and with a sense of sure direction that his (Gandhi's) life and work impart, to practise austerity and honesty in personal and public life "

Within an hour of the pledge, the Janata leaders were fighting amongst themselves in the best traditions of the Congress Party Within weeks, the Ministers of the Janata Government were driving up and down Lutyens' New Delhi searching for the right bungalows for themselves,

[5]*The New Yorker*, 17 October 1977

with the right frontage, the right lawns at the back, and the right streets Next, they and their spouses were picking and choosing from the array of furniture, air-conditioners, geysers, and other appliances offered by the Central Public Works Department Tailors were specially called to ensure that the carpets ran floor to floor, and the curtains had the "right fall" The wives of the Socialist and former "Young Turk" Ministers were specially concerned about the "suitability" of their bungalows and their furnishing For months, there was a great pother about the President moving out to a more modest place but, at the end of the year, the Presidential Estate was still intact, and all talk of moving had been forgotten

The new Janata Ministers in the states were not to be left behind They were grabbing bungalows, sometimes two or more Ministers fighting for the same house, as happened in Bihar, the home of the "total revolution" Came the tell tale story from Bhopal, the headquarters of the former "Princes of Chhatisgarh," the Shuklas Their Janata counterparts were busy keeping the old traditions alive " Some of the new leaders," said the report from a senior Bhopal journalist, "indulge in the same whims and fancies which guided the actions of the previous incumbents Typical of this attitude is what is being referred to as 'the tale of two houses' in the state capital These are the Circuit House and the Chief Minister's official residence which have been interchanged many times in the past few years because of the fads of successive Chief Ministers A huge sum was spent on renovating both buildings to suit their new roles Competent sources estimated the renovation costs at not less than Rs five lakhs Mr Saklecha (the new CM of MP) has chosen to move into the Circuit House earlier selected by P C Sethi as the Chief Minister's residence He has ordered re-conversion of the bungalow . "

Like V C Shukla, whom he had defeated, P Kaushik, a former Socialist, and now the Janata Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism, thought that his topmost priority ought to be to extend the Indian Airlines services to his constituency, Raipur Within a month of his taking over charge of the ministry, *senior officials were flitting between Delhi* and Raipur to make feasibility studies for the plane service Where even Shukla had failed, his Janata successor succeeded

And within weeks, the Janata Ministers were flying off in all directions of the globe, to spread the great "Janata message" There was a time when nearly a dozen of the central Ministers were either out in some foreign country or about to embark on one As was recently

revealed in Parliament, over Rs 12 lakhs had been spent on foreign trips, covering 25 countries, by 11 Janata Ministers in the course of four months (November 1977 to February 1978) This did not include the bills for five trips

What was curious about these trips, as one Janata MP pointed out, was that most of the Ministers had gone to European countries, while the government was supposedly more concerned about its relations with Asian and Afro-Asian countries One of the Ministers, Chand Ram, had spent Rs 27,000 on a visit to Britain, Poland, and Holland to "undertake a first-hand study of ship-building activities in these countries" A side reason that the Minister for Shipping and Transport gave was—"I also wanted to see the road systems Their trucks carry so much more than ours, while our roads just sink I wanted to see how they are able to do this"

Raj Narain, who went just to clown around UK as an all-paid guest of the British Government, thought it necessary to take his sadhu, Chandra Swami with him, perhaps at his own cost! Another Minister, a former "radical' of the Congress, became the subject of gossip among the Indian community in Paris by having gone to the *Moulin Rouge* and all the *rendezvous* around the Pigalle in an Embassy car "One can understand even that," commented one Embassy officer, "but why did he have to go to those places in his Gandhi cap?"



Hardly a week passed without some horrid story of atrocities on Gandhi's Harijans coming through from one state or the other "105 Harijans killed in Madhya Pradesh during March-November 1977," came an official report from Bhopal But with a stiff upper lip, the Home Minister quoted chapter and verse in Parliament to prove that there had been "no increase" in anti-Harijan crimes after the Janata take-over When the cases of mounting atrocities in Bihar were raised in Lok Sabha, the Home Minister told the House calmly that the state government had reported that these were "actually the outcome of a rivalry between two groups of criminals," and went on to praise the Bihar Chief Minister, Karpoori Thakur, for his "honesty, competence, and integrity" Even in the case of Belchchi atrocities, which Indira Gandhi exploited to her fullest advantage, Charan Singh had taken the same view—"just a case of clash between armed groups" This was despite the fact that a group of MPs led by a Janata leader,

Ram Dhan, had investigated the incident, and condemned it as an attack on Harijans "Ram Dhan is only attacking the Home Minister because he is a Jagjivan man," said the courtiers of Charan Singh

Jagjivan Ram, the great leader of Harijans, fumed and fretted, but did nothing beyond making caustic comments against the "kulak lobby" It was quite in line with his record of 30 years in the Congress Government which had seen a series of humiliations and atrocities heaped on the Harijans He had stayed put in the cabinet "Has he ever resigned because of atrocities on the Harijans?" his critics ask "What he is concerned about is his own honour and dignity Look at the pother over the Varanasi incident What if some miscreants poured Ganga water over a statue he had unveiled? That's nothing compared to the indignities the Harijans suffer day in and day out, but does he really care?"

The war of attrition between the two principal groups in the Janata Party, the one headed by Morarji Desai, and the other by Charan Singh was no figment of imagination as some of the Janata leaders often described it Even the concerted tirade against Kanti Desai emanated from the residence of the Home Minister, with one tall journalist after another falling in line behind the new "Steel Man" of India The courtiers of Charan Singh had convinced him that a conspiracy had been hatched to divest him of the Home portfolio or, at least, to take away the intelligence agencies from him "Even Jagjivan Ram and Bahuguna have joined Morarji in a bid to oust you," they told Charan Singh Soon the counterattack was mounted

The debacle in the South gave Charan Singh and his men a new handle to beat the other side with All those angling for the party Presidentship ganged up to raise a hue and cry Some of them were discreet enough not to launch the attack directly, but there were tub-thumpers like Raj Narain who went straight for the "enemies" But even he was careful about whom to attack His targets were Jagjivan Ram, Bahuguna, Chandra Shekhar, never Morarji Desai himself Those who knew Raj Narain, knew that he was essentially a Morarji man He was only using the power and glory of the UP chieftain as long as it suited him, just as the Jana Sangh group was using him for its own purpose

Soon after the second split in the Congress on 1 January 1978, Chandra Bhanu Gupta told some of his political allies that there "is no need to carry the BLD liability any more" He was for "shunting" Charan Singh off, and going in for a combination with the Reddy Con-

gress, but Chandra Shekhar is believed to have argued with Gupta that they should not rush things They were already thinking of some new combination, Gupta was told "Have a little patience, let the elections in South pass, then we will see"

But things did not quite go as they had thought The Reddy Congress was routed, and Reddy himself resigned The projected realignment of forces got put off In a way, the re-emergence of Indira Gandhi as a force in the South once again helped, at least temporarily, the warring leaders of the Janata Party stay put

Their preoccupation with Indira Gandhi was almost pathological All through the year, the new rulers had little to talk and shout about, except Indira Gandhi and her caucus As one eminent commentator aptly put it, "the digging up of the time capsule outside Delhi's Red Fort is symbolic of the Janata Party's period in office digging up the past has acquired a fascination of its own "

The Janata leaders were talking about the lady not in two or three but in myriad voices Some wanted her to be "hanged" straightaway, some to arraign her before a people's court, perhaps at the Vijay Chowk, some wanted her to be tried by a Nuremburg type of court, some wanted her to be dragged to the Tihar jail, to the very cell where the Janata Home Minister was kept during detention, some, like Chandra Shekhar, wanted her to be left alone to "die a natural political death" The Janata President, who had been a professed admirer of the brave lady at one time, thought what the country needed was a politics of consensus, not of confrontation, whatever he meant by that Many keen observers of political creatures including, at least, one perceptive cartoonist, saw "Indira germs" in Chandra Shekhar's blood!

To top it all, there was her bungled arrest and release which, by itself, gave the lady more political mileage than she could have hoped for in years

In the wake of the new attacks on him from within the party, Charan Singh is more wary about what he says on Indira Gandhi His close supporters are believed to have impressed upon him the fact that it was not politically wise for him to carry the battle against Indira Gandhi to a point of no return, for he might some day be forced to ally with her against the others That could be one way of ensuring the crown for himself A rather remote possibility as of now, but as Disraeli said, never say "never" in politics

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The Janata had come to power on a negative vote, but having got the windfall, they didn't seem to know what to do with their good fortune, except survive on negativism The digging-up was all right, if they had shown any inclination to build as well There was certainly no dearth of populist demagogy, with fire brands like George Fernandes on their side He had been most reluctant to participate in the government, for days he was like a Prometheus running away from shackles But, eventually, he allowed himself to be "bound"—to "go from one jail to another," as he described his acceptance of Ministership

The self-confessed saboteur turned Minister began with a bang, surprising everybody who had doubted the ability of a rabble-rouser to run a ministry Within days of becoming a Minister, he was exposing the "decadent decade" that had been described by Indira's PR machine as the "Great decade of progress" And within days of taking over as the Minister for Industries, George was giving a piece of his mind to the great leaders of Indian industry, lambasting them for abandoning all moral values, and helping those in power during the Emergency "Why do men supposed to be the captains of industry and leaders in their trade kowtow to those in authority? What is it that is missing in one's character that makes men behave like rats?"

He had spoken with devastating effect, both inside and outside Parliament A chill had run down the spines of the country's industrialists when he told them, "One of your tribe mentioned the other day that Rs 40 crores went to the erstwhile dictator's party to help it in the elections I would like to be enlightened on the ways and means employed to get this money"

The fiery man from Mangalore, who had set out to be a Roman Catholic priest but had become a firebrand politician, was asserting from his new pulpit, "I know big business and multinational companies are powerful, but we are not concerned We are made of better stuff If they think they would be able to continue to manipulate as they did in the past, I am afraid they are in for a very bad experience" Big business and multinationals have no place, he thundered But within months, he was assuaging the fears of the big business, and telling them that the Janata Government was evolving a "multi-dimensional" approach towards industrial growth under which small and cottage units as well as big houses had a vital role to play without undermining each other. "Multinationals can play a big role," a delegation of multinational firms was assured by the Janata Government

Having packed off the Coca Cola and the IBM, Fernandes became a

champion of the multinationals from England and West Germany, areas closer to his heart He would not see that multinationals were multinationals, whether they came from America or from the American satellites in Europe The great trade union leader had spent years trying to fashion himself after the great Labour leaders of Great Britain, and perhaps saw himself as another Bevan He had been a painstaking trade unionist, and had delighted in throwing challenges to the barons of industry, but some of his former associates allege that he had also been known to "make up with the barons on the side"

Having vowed to clear the debris of the 30 years of Congress misrule, in the true tradition of a Lohia devotee, Fernandes and his ministry toiled for months to produce what one economic writer described as "just a dead mouse"

"Like the previous government," he wrote, "the Janata Government also does not know what exactly it wants from large houses The only difference is that it has now opened non-consumer industries also for large houses They can now enter all industries "[4]

There had been several allegations by the Indira Gandhi Government regarding his trade union activities, implying that Fernandes was corrupt, and that his underground movement was financed from abroad When an interviewer asked him about the charges, the Emergency's Scarlet Pimpernel said in his inimitable style, 'That is one of the biggest canards spread about me, and I have answered this canard in Parliament In fact, from the underground, I wrote to Madame Dictator nailing all her lies about foreign funds, and I had also said, Madame Dictator, some day in the not very distant future I shall be able to vindicate my honour What will you do, Madame Dictator, what will you tell the world? That you could not help lying because lying came naturally to you? And I have vindicated myself, and Madame Dictator can only say that she is a congenital liar The money was received on the 26th or 27th of May 1975 in Jodhpur before the cameras of the newspapers of the entire country with Mr Jayaprakash Narayan inaugurating the golden jubilee convention of the All India Railwaymen's Federation, with the Japanese delegation of railway men present there, presenting two cheques before the clicking of the cameras of the national press "[5]

George had come a long way since he began life "out on the footpath

[4]Kewal Varma in *Business Standard*, 31 December 1977.
[5]*Sunday*, Calcutta

outside Prospect Chambers" in Bombay There, the young trade unionist, who had chucked the white cassock and plunged into the rough and tumble of life, came in touch with another gentleman from Mangalore, Peter D'Mello He, too, had started life in Bombay the hard way, and risen to become the most powerful trade union leader of the city George came to real prominence only after the premature death of D'Mello, and became a power in his own right For years, he held sway over the vital core of industry—labour He was only 38 years old when he trounced the Tammany Hall boss of Bombay, the mighty S K Patil, in the Lok Sabha elections of 1967 Fernandes had described it as a fight between the haves and the have-nots The have nots had won

But what he can do for the have-nots in his present position is another matter The fiery trade unionist who claimed to have "caused derailments of 52 trains," had become not just a Minister in the Janata menagerie, but was often a Minister-in-Waiting, to boot!

At the other end of the Janata spectrum is the other Scarlet Pimpernel of the Emergency, Subramaniam Swamy, who asserts that in another ten years the Janata Party will "think in the same ideological framework as mine"[8]

"My ideology," he goes on, "is Indian My concept is that India is a centre, a pole by itself Its broad framework of culture springs from Hinduism I do not mean any conversion to Hinduism or that sort of thing My wife is a Parsee I visualize India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Ceylon as one country All this madness of Nehru and Jinnah will disappear As for the economy, I think it can only run properly if the system suits the genius of the country Our genius is the small trader, the small entrepreneur I don't reject the role of the government but, in my scheme of things, it would only be the role of an umpire between consumers and producers, not a dominant role I see a system in which the rules are grossly simple, a system in which inequality would be changed by production, not by taxation .My framework will ultimately take root in the country"

During the first month of the Janata Government, Swamy told a British journalist that he visualized his former party, the Jana Sangh, emerging again, but he has now changed his view "I have changed my view because I had not visualized that three of the leaders would behave as they have behaved Vajpayee, Nanaji, and Advani They have abandoned the role of leadership of the Jana Sangh group" It was ob-

[8]Subraman[illegible]

viously his personal grouse against them that he was expressing "Yes, I stand by every word I wrote about Vajpayee and his foreign policy in the *Sunday*," he asserts

Vajpayee's fury spilled over at the meeting of the party's Central Parliamentary Board on 4 April 1978 Both he and Charan Singh spoke of the attacks on them by some partymen, encouraged by some leaders Vajpayee obviously referred to the *Sunday* article of Swamy, and Charan Singh to the interview given by Jagjivan Ram to a Bombay journal in which he attacked the "kulak lobby" Both accused the party leadership of leaving them to defend themselves Morarji Desai, too, could have had plenty of grouse against "inspired attacks" on his son, but he was the "umpire" who could not bring himself into the dispute!

A year after it came to power, the Janata Party has remained a faceless party without any identity of its own With all its professed idealism, it has kept its doors wide open for all variety of defectors, from Chimanbhai Patel down to Raja Dinesh Singh The ease with which they walked blithely into the Janata fold showed the party leaders in their true light None of them would take the responsibility for their entry into the party directly, not even Dinesh Singh's old chum, Chandra Shekhar "It was Morarji who allowed their entry," said Chandra Shekhar, but he explained there was a rider to their entry—that they would not hold any office in the party! As though Raja Dinesh Singh needed a post in the party to operate! A membership of the Rajya Sabha was enough for him for the moment, he had somehow to retain his posh bungalow on the Tyagraj Marg! Having got into the party, he had promptly built his pipeline with Chaudhuri Charan Singh, too, with the help of his friend, Shyam Nandan Mishra "Dinesh Singh, with his Rajput base in UP, will be a very useful counter-force to Chandra Shekhar," the Home Minister was told by his new-found supporters It immediately struck as a good idea to the former "Ajgar" Chief

The number of defectors given Janata tickets in Andhra Pradesh? One estimate put it at over 150 The more the merrier!



An "official review" of the one year of Janata rule claimed success in "imparting a decisive directional shift to the entire working of the government machinery and spectacular improvement in the working of every ministry in the central government ' Of course, it could not mention that right under the nose of the great law-and-order expert, Chau-

dhari Charan Singh, banks were being robbed in broad daylight, young hoodlums were looting passengers in buses at dagger point right in the city of Delhi In the States of UP and Bihar, where his own dear men of great honesty and integrity, and efficiency ruled, what prevailed was the rule of the jungle

But the God trusting Morarji Desai is confident that milk and honey will flow in the country in "ten years" He did not forget to renew his pledge to the people to "banish fear and want" In a stiff, dead pan voice, he went on wearily with his year-end message, Our new priorities are very clear and realistic We do not believe in fancies and utopias, but in hard facts and progress, according to our capacity to achieve, absorb, and sustain ."

Back in his Kadamkuan house in Patna, Jayaprakash Narayan issued a carefully worded statement, full of understatements, "But in the field of socio-economic reforms, the Janata Party has not been able to do much. The promises made in the party manifesto, specially in the matter of radical reforms, have mostly remained pious wishes " The old man, whom many describe as "a helpless bird amidst vultures," has his own queer dilemma The Godfather cannot be too rough with his own child! "*Yeh bhi to mera ek ang hai*" (It is also a part of me), he repeats to his associates

But often, he can't keep the sense of defeat and frustration to himself. It wells up, as in the interview he recently gave to a Delhi journal Asked what he felt after watching the political developments over the past year, JP said, "*I feel very miserable* But for my ill health—due to which I am helpless—I would have done something "[1]

The *unkindest cut of all* was the presentation of a purse of Rs 90 lakhs on his 75th birth anniversary amidst a shower of stones and chappals— *in the same* Gandhi Maidan which had gone into a frenzy with cries of "Loknayak Zindabad" just a year ago

We had moved a full circle

[1]*India Today*, 16 31 March 1978

X

After Morarji Who?

THERE WILL be so many in the ring! Chaudhuri Charan Singh, Jagjivan Ram, Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna, Atal Behari Vajpayee, Chandra Shekhar, George Fernandes, and who knows who else? Mercifully, it won't be Raj Narain, for the simple reason that his ideals are Hanuman and Lakshman

Many have their eyes set on the crown, but who will it be? And when? And how?

The Tantriks and the fortune-tellers have promised it to Charan Singh, but so have they promised to Indira Gandhi! Perhaps, the same ones at that! "Wait and watch," said one astrologer with great conviction, "she will be back" But if one were to go by what they said, she would still have been there, or Charan Singh would have taken over in October 1977 When the prediction failed, they said, "It's just that Morarji survived a *markesh!*"

Morarji Desai has a charmed life At 82, he is more robust and alive than many of his younger colleagues Whether it is because of his elixir of life or some other secret of keeping his inner springs alive, he may well outlive many others So let them not put too much store by that

What one of them might try to do is to oust Morarji Desai, but who can do it? The supporters of Charan Singh are already toying with the idea For months, they have been counting heads, totting up figures, making all sorts of permutations and combinations "If Charan Singh wants, he can break the Janata Party," boasted one associate of the former BLD Chief "He made it, he can break it!" Charan Singh is, perhaps, still the leader with the largest single following among the Janata MPs, but is he in a position to stage a coup?

To go back to the position in March 1977, the group-wise break-up of the Janata MPs in Lok Sabha was roughly this way—Jana Sangh—93, BLD—71, Congress (O)—51, Socialists—28, Chandra Shekhar group—6, CFD—28, Unattached or regional parties—25 The BLD had not been a solid chunk even then Of its strength of 71, about 26 were followers of Raj Narain, about 14 of Biju Patnaik, and the rest were men owing absolute allegiance to Charan Singh

Since then, there have been changes in almost all the groups, except perhaps the Jana Sangh which would be affected only marginally if it came to the crunch Chaudhuri Charan Singh has certainly gained a few MPs from the Congress (O) group, who have gone over to him with Shyam Nandan Mishra and Banarasi Das, a former lieutenant of C B Gupta But their number cannot be more than half a dozen On the other hand, the exodus from the BLD group has been far more noticeable Charan Singh can no longer depend on the Biju men, nor does he have the former BLD man, H M Patel, with him any more They have switched their allegiance to Desai And if it came to pulling Morarji down, Charan Singh would find his dear Hanuman carrying the stones for his adversary!

It's curious why Raj Narain has had this inner pipeline with Morarji Desai His support for Desai in the race for the Prime Ministership was, of course, understandable He was working at the behest of his great patron, Chandra Bhanu Gupta But there was more to it than that Some people ascribe it to Raj Narain's "caste loyalties," a charge he would vehemently deny like all good Lohia men But Raj Narain Singh (the "Singh" was banished by Lohia), it is alleged, remains very much a Bhumihar! In the crowd at his house, one would often hear people greeting one another as "Bhumihar Shiromani," and not entirely as a joke There is a preponderance of Bhumihars in the crowd at 7 (Sorry, Raj Narain got the number of the house changed to 8, at the advice of his Tantriks) Race Course Road But what has Raj Narain's "Bhumihari" got to do with his support to Morarji Desai?

Anybody who goes to Bihar would get the answer For well over a decade now, the Bhumihars of Bihar have always looked up to Morarji Desai as their "caste leader" at the centre Whether it had something to do with the close association of the Bihar Bhumihar leader, Mahesh Prasad Sinha, with Desai, or with the long and personal links between Tarkeshwari Sinha (a Bhumihar) and Morarji Desai is hard to say Morarji Desai himself is a Anavil Brahmin from Gujarat, but it is possible that the Bhumihars, who have strangely enough always aspired to

graduate to the status of Brahmins, for whatever it may be worth, may have thought Morarji a suitable "caste leader" for themselves

In any case, Raj Narain's links with the Morarji camp are much stronger, albeit clandestine, than one would imagine And so, there go the Raj Narain men! In effect, the biggest contender for the crown is left with no more than 40 men

But Charan Singh has hooked his hopes to the powerful Jana Sangh group With them, he hopes to make a solid nucleus which would attract many of the fence-sitters and unattached MPs But would the Jana Sangh go with Chaudhuri Charan Singh? They have, by and large, been on his side on crucial issues so far, such as the elections in the states It was the combination of the BLD and Jana Sangh which hogged most of the seats in the Assembly elections of June 1977, and it was these two which got the biggest chunks of the melon "It was all according to our strength," the Jana Sangh leaders would tell you vehemently "Show us any state where we got more seats or more Ministers than our strength justified In fact, we got less than our strength everywhere UP and Bihar went to BLD Chief Ministers because they had more MLAs, Rajasthan and MP came to us because we had more strength in these states Where and how was it unfair?"

If there have been any clever strategists in the Janata Party, they are the Jana Sangh leaders They are the ones who have gained the most, right from the beginning Their goal is clear, well set After they decided that they would go in for a merger, they have been firm and clear about it They had decided they would not hurry, and never be the cause of any crisis that would jeopardize the Janata Party, for they were sure that they stood to gain the most from it To begin with, they were for Jagjivan Ram for the Prime Ministership, but the moment they realized that it could lead to a rift in the lute, they switched over smoothly and calmly to Desai When Charan Singh wangled the charge of elections all over north India, they went along with him to share the cake Also, they could see that the BLD group was nothing but Charan Singh, it would die with him So why not make the best use of the BLD, and through it, get a hold in the rural areas where they were weak? The strategy has paid them well, the Jana Sangh and RSS cadres are now in areas where they had never been before

Unlike the other groups, the Jana Sangh has never believed in working on a single level While remaining on the side of Charan Singh, they have not closed their doors with Morarji or Jagjivan Ram In fact, some of the strongest statements in support of Morarji have come from Atal

Behari Vajpayee, who has often described him as "our undisputed leader"

The Jana Sangh is in no hurry to bring matters to a head It would make the best use of the Janata Party, and stake its claim only when it thinks it has become powerful enough to dictate terms to the others Until then, it would win as much goodwill and acceptability as possible, for that has been its biggest drawback so far—its "untouchability," as some of its leaders put it The group has been trying hard to live down the stigma that has come to be attached to the Jana Sangh and the RSS It has given the Janata Government the only Ministers who have made a mark in their own fields It is the only group which has not indulged in irresponsible statements "We are for a smooth and united functioning of the Janata Party," said one of its perceptive leaders

And so, if Charan Singh decides to rock the boat, he will find the Jana Sangh cool as cucumber The group would have no hesitation in throwing its weight with Morarji Desai, leaving Chaudhuri Charan Singh high and dry

Indeed, it is this realization which has delayed the Charan Singh brigade from going into action Much as Charan Singh wants to be the Prime Minister of India as fast as possible, he is in no position to oust Morarji Desai And until he is sure he can do that, he wouldn't queer the pitch for the Janata Party He would much rather prefer to be the Minister for Forest, if that is what Morarji wants him to be, than go into the wilderness

Only in the event of Desai suddenly passing out of the scene would the question of succession really arise And even then, the real question would not so much be "After Morarji Who?" but "After Morarji's Successor Who?" Even if either Charan Singh or Jagjivan Ram somehow make it to the throne, their age and physical condition would be against them Charan Singh, 76, has often told his friends how he wishes he were ten years younger Jagjivan Ram is six years younger than his adversary, but he has had close shaves more than once One cannot see many years of Prime Ministership for either

Eventually, the choice would have to be made from among the younger men And the chances are that by the time the next Lok Sabha elections are over, the Jana Sangh would be ready to throw its hat into the ring The group's obvious choice would be Vajpayee, though it has a superior man in Lal Krishna Advani Unfortunately, sober and down-to-earth men are at a great disadvantage in this country which has come to love flashiness, flamboyance, and what many call a "charisma" which has

often turned out to be no more than a will-o'-the wisp

So Vajpayee is most likely to be the group's man for the job He is supposed to have something of Nehru in him, he is supposed to be acceptable to a wide spectrum of political opinion in the country He is flashy, he is charming he is a good speaker Who cares to know if he has the right stuff in him to pull the country out of the morass?

Much as some people have tried to make out that Vajpayee is at cross-purposes with the RSS bosses, the fact remains that neither Vajpayee is ready to break from the RSS tether nor is the RSS ready to let Vajpayee go His liberal image is just what helps the RSS and the Jana Sangh group The more he is baited by the so-called hard-liners of the RSS the more he would gain and, through him, the parent organization It could even be a game they are playing for the larger cause!

Atal Behari Vajpayee has been assiduously building up his image as a liberal nationalist leader whose appeal goes beyond the bounds of the Jana Sangh and the RSS He would speak in Hindi at the UN General Assembly, for it is dramatic to do so, and immediately gives him a nationalistic image in the minds of people in India, at least, in the Hindi-speaking belt he belongs to But Vajpayee would do nothing to show himself as a Hindi zealot, as the short-sighted politicians of the Lohia variety would do Vajpayee has shed off his angularities on language, and would not hesitate to speak in English when the occasion demands it

Vajpayee was friendlier and more outgoing with the Soviet leaders in Moscow and Kiev than he was with the visitors from the White House "Indo Soviet friendship is as strong as Bokaro steel," he proclaimed in the Soviet Union, and the statement continues to be repeated in the articles of *Pravada* and *Izvestia* Vajpayee has made it a point to avoid any such statements about India's friendship with America

What is more, the Jana Sangh leaders have come to realize that no political party or group in this country can make good without a veneer of Socialism, and so they talk about the imperative need to alleviate the poor and the down trodden They were among the most ardent oath-takers at the Raj Ghat and, perhaps, one of the most sincere articles on Gandhi in the last year came from the pen of Atal Behari Vajpayee, who now understands Gandhi better

The friends of Chandra Shekhar are pretty sure in their minds about his Prime Ministerial potential No doubt he has come up From just a "coffee house radical" until some years ago, he has come to be among the "top five" of the ruling Janata Party Quite a progress, by any standard But his performance as the Janata Chief is bound to prove a block rather

than an asset for his future career He has come to have the image of a Hamlet who can never decide "whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles " One of his "favourite pastimes" has been to chat with friends, and that is what he seems to be up to most of the time In a whole year, even the groundwork for the party's organization has not been laid As one of the former General Secretaries of the Janata Party said, "The fact is that Chandra Shekhar has failed to emotionally integrate the party "

His plus points, his friends would tell you, are his radical image and his incorruptibility But these are, at best, matters of value scales which differ from man to man Indeed, it is better to forget that morality has any place in politics today The only question is who has the guts and the fibre to succeed in this rat race Judging by that standard, Chandra Shekhar would not seem to stand much chance He has neither the base nor much of a philosophic content to give to the country

George Fernandes has the dynamism of a volcano He is a man who loves to be where the action is and, at 49, he has long years to go He has shown a capacity for hard work, and instead of getting involved in political controversies, he has preferred to project the image of a businesslike Minister But he has continually tied himself up in knots, saying one thing about the goals and means today, and quite another tomorrow He could partly explain this away as the result of the inbuilt pulls and pressures inside the Janata coalition

Fernandes has the flash and flamboyance of a leader He has the oratory of a demagogue All these are qualities you need to succeed, but when the chips are down, it is doubtful how much suppor the can muster

Indeed, the question of succession is fraught with too many imponderables Who can be sure what sort of political picture would emerge from the next ballot boxes? There are political observers who would not rule out the possibility of such a hotch-potch emerging after the next elections that the only alternative to chaos and disorder would be to form a national government, in which case, any dark horse could emerge as the agreed choice Some think, it could even be Jyoti Basu—a very remote possibility, but never say "never" in politics!

As of now, one can take one safe wager—Whoever is the Prime Minister four years hence, he will have the lady sitting opposite him—the Opposition leader from Rae Bareli!

Bio-Data

MORARJI DESAI, BA; *s* of Ranchhodji Desai, *b* Bhadeli, Bulsar district, 29 February 1896, *educated* at Wilson College, Bombay, *m* Gajraben Desai, 1911, one son and one daughter, entered Provincial Civil Service, Government of Bombay, 1918, resigned in 1930, joined the Civil Disobedience movement, suffered imprisonment twice during 1930-34 and again in 1940-41, and detained in 1942-45, imprisoned during the Emergency for about 19 months, 1975-77, Secretary, Gujarat Pradesh Congress Committee, 1931-37, and again from 1939-46, Treasurer, All India Congress Committee, 1950-58, Chancellor, Gujarat Vidyapeeth, Member, Bombay Legislative Assembly, 1937-39 and 1946-56, Minister for Revenue, Co-operation, Agriculture, and Forests, Bombay, 1937-39, Minister for Home and Revenue, Bombay, 1946-52, Chief Minister of Bombay, 1952-56, Member, Lok Sabha, since 1957, Minister for Commerce and Industry, Government of India, 1956-58, Minister for Finance, 1958-63, resigned from the Government under the "Kamaraj Plan," 1963, Chairman, Administrative Reforms Commission, Government of India, 1966-67, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, 1967-69, attended the meetings of Commonwealth Finance Ministers' Conference, Montreal, 1958, London, 1959, 1960, 1962, and 1968, Accra, 1961, and at Trinidad in 1967, the World Bank Meetings at Washington, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1962 and 1968, Vienna, 1961, and at Brazil in 1967

Favourite Pastime and Recreation—Classical and devotional Indian music and classical Indian dances

Special Interests—Education, agriculture, horticulture, dairying, animal husbandry, co-operatives, spinning, and all the Gandhian activities

Publications—Discourses on the Gita, The Story of My Life, *and a book on* Nature Cure

Sports and Clubs—Bridge, cricket, tennis, hockey, and several other Indian games

Permanent Address—"Oceana," Marine Drive, Bombay

CHARAN SINGH, BSc, MA, LLB, *s* of Chaudhuri Meer Singh, *b* at Noorpur Village, Ghaziabad district, 23 December 1902 *ed* at Government High School, Meerut and Agra College, Agra, *m* Gayatri Devi, 5 June 1925, one son and five daughters, associated with the Congress, 1929-67, Founder-Leader of (i) Bharatiya Kranti Dal, 1967, (ii) Bharatiya Lok Dal, 1974, and (iii) Janata Party, 1977, Vice-Chairman, District Board, Meerut, 1930-35, Member, Legislative Assembly, UP, 1937-39 and 1946 77, Parliamentary Secretary, UP, 1946-1951, Minister UP, 1951-67 with a gap of 17 months, Chief Minister, UP, April 1967-February 1968, Leader of the Opposition, UP Assembly, 1971-77, Chief Minister, UP, February 1970-October 1970

Favourite Pastime and Recreation—Reading

Special Interests—Economic problems, especially agrarian problems

Publications—Abolition of Zamindar, Co operative Farming X-Rayed, Agrarian Revolution in Uttar Pradesh, Towards Gandhi *and* India's Economic Policy

Permanent Address—5 Race Course Road, New Delhi

JAGJIVAN RAM, BSc, *s* of Shobhi Ram, *b* at Chandwa, Bhojpur district, 5 April 1908, *ed* at Banaras Hindu University and Calcutta University, *m* Indrani Devi, 2 June 1935, one son and one daughter, appeared before Hammond Commission, 1936, started agricultural labour movement in Bihar, and formed Bihar Provincial Khet Mazdoor Sabha in 1937, Member, All India Congress Committee, from 1940, jailed in 1940 and 1942, and released in 1943 on medical grounds, Vice-President, Bihar branch of All India Trade Unions Congress, 1940-46, Secretary, Bihar Provincial Congress Committee, 1940-46, Member (i) Executive Committee, Hindustan Mazdoor Sewak Sangh since 1947, (ii) All India Congress Working Committee since 1948, (iii) Congress Economic Planning Subcommittee, (iv) Central Parliamentary Board, AICC

since 1950, (v) Central Election Committee, 1951-56 and 1961, President, All India Congress Committee, 1969-71 Resigned from Congress, and joined Congress for Democracy, February 1977 Member (i) Bihar Legislative Council, 1936 (nominated), (ii) Bihar Legislative Assembly, 1937-46, Parliamentary Secretary, Bihar Government, 1937-39, Member (i) Central Legislative Assembly and Constituent Assembly, 1946-50, (ii) Provisional Parliament, 1950-52, (iii) Lok Sabha continuously since 1952, Labour Minister, GOI, 1946-52, Minister for Communications, 1952-56, Minister for Transport and Railways, 1956-57, Minister for Railways, 1957-62, Minister for Transport and Communications, 1962-63, resigned under "Kamaraj Plan", became Minister for Labour, Employment, and Rehabilitation in January 1966, Minister for Food and Agriculture, Community Development, and Co-operation, 1967-70, Defence Minister, 1970-74, Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation, 1974-77, Minister for Defence since March 1977

Favourite Pastime and Recreation—Gardening, reading, swimming, dance, drama, music, and fine arts

Special Interests—Economics and mathematics

Publications—A Collection of Speeches on Labour Problems

Sports and Clubs—Tennis.

Travels Abroad—Europe, USSR, and South-East Asia

Permanent Address—Chandwa village and PO, Bhojpur district, Bihar

HEMWATI NANDAN BAHUGUNA, BA, *s* of late Rewati Nandan Bahuguna, *b* at Bughani village, Garhwal district, 25 April 1919, *ed* at DAV College, Dehra Dun, Government College, Allahabad, Allahabad University; *m* Kamala Bahuguna, 1946, two sons and one daughter, studies interrupted for taking part in Quit India movement in 1942, declared absconder, arrested, and kept in detention in Delhi and UP jails during 1943-45, participated in students' movement, Member, UP Congress Committee from 1952, and AICC from 1957, General Secretary, UP Pradesh Congress Committee, 1963-69, nominated, and subsequently, elected member of the Working Committee, AICC, 1969-71, General Secretary, AICC, Member (i) Working Committee, Allahabad University Students' Union, 1940-41, (ii) Working Committee of INTUC, (iii) Secretary, Uttar Pradesh Students' Federation, Member, UP Legislative Assembly, 1952-69 and 1974-77, Parliamentary Secretary, UP, 1957, Deputy Minister, UP, 1958, but resigned

in 1960, joined as Deputy Minister of Labour, UP, in 1962, resigned again in 1963, rejoined as Minister of Finance and Transport, UP, 1967, became Chief Minister of UP, 1973, resigned from Chief Ministership in 1975, Member of fifth Lok Sabha, 1971-74, was Union Minister for Communications, 1971, Minister of Petroleum and Chemicals, and Fertilizers since March 1977

Social Activities—organized a large number of trade unions of Allahabad under INTUC Established a number of schools and colleges

Favourite Pastime and Recreation—Gardening and reading

Special Interests—Welfare of youth and Harijan uplift

Publications—Author of a number of articles, pamphlet entitled, Indianisation Whom, *published by AICC in 1970*

Travels Abroad—UK, Germany, France, Italy, and Rumania

Permanent Address—12-B, Hastings Road, Allahabad

RAJ NARAIN, BA, LLB, *s* of late Anant Prasad Singh, *b* at Motikot village, Varanasi district, 15 March 1917, *married*, three sons and one daughter, previously associated with the Samyukta Socialist Party and Bharatiya Lok Dal, imprisoned 58 times for a period totalling about 15 years in connection with students' and socialist movements, Chairman, Socialist Party, 1961, Member, UP Legislative Assembly, 1952 and 1957, Member, Rajya Sabha, 1966-72 and 1974-76, Minister of Health and Family Welfare since March 1977

Special Interests—Political and social work, yoga, Indian culture and philosophy

Sports and Clubs—Wrestling

Travels Abroad—Kuwait, USSR, Iran, France, Afghanistan, andUK

Permanent Address—Motikot village, Gangapur PO, Varanasi district

CHANDRA SHEKHAR, MA, *s* of late Sadanand Singh, *b* at Ibrahimpatti village, Ballia district, 1 July 1927, *ed* at DAV College, Mau Azamgarh, Jiwan Ram High School, Mau Azamgarh, Satish Chandra College, Ballia, and Allahabad University, *married*, one son, previously associated with Socialist Party and Congress, President, District Students' Congress, Ballia, 1947, Secretary (i) Samajwadi Yuvak Sabha, 1950, (ii) City Socialist Party, Allahabad 1951-52, (iii) Praja Socialist Party,

Ballia, 1952 56, (iv) State PSP, UP Joint Secretary, State PSP, 1955 57, Member, National Executive, PSP, 1959-62, Member, All India Congress Working Committee, 1969 75, elected to the Central Election Committee of the Congress in 1971, arrested under MISA, June 1975 released from jail in January 1977, President, Janata Party since May 1977, Member, Rajya Sabha, 1962 77

Favourite Pastime and Recreation—Gardening, travel, and chatting with friends on political and social problems

Special Interests—Primary education and health services

Permanent Address—Ibrahimpatti, Ballia district, UP

ATAL BEHARI VAJPAYEE, MA *s* of Pandit Krishna Behari Vajpayee, *b* at Gwalior, 25 December 1926, *ed* at Victoria College, Gwalior, DAV College, Kanpur, *bachelor*, social worker and journalist, founder-member and Organizing Secretary of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, President, Jana Sangh, 1969 and 1971, Secretary, All India Jana Sangh, 1956-66, Member, National Integration Council, President, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Research Centre, Delhi, President, All India Station Masters' and Assistant Station Masters' Association, 1965-70, Member, Second Lok Sabha, 1957-62, Fourth Lok Sabha, 1967-70, Fifth Lok Sabha, 1971-77, Rajya Sabha, 1962-67, Minister of External Affairs since March 1977

Social Activities—Hindu Sangathan, eradication of untouchability and casteism and emancipation of women

Favourite Pastime and Recreation—Travelling and cooking

Special Interest—International Affairs

Publications—Lok Sabha Men Atalji, Mrityu Ya Hatya, Amar Balidan, *and a series of poems written in jail during the Emergency*

Permanent Address—7 Safdarjang Road, New Delhi

LAL KRISHNA ADVANI, Law Graduate, *s* of Kishinchand D Advani *b* at Karachi, 8 November 1927, *ed* at St Patrick's High School, Karachi, D G National College, Hyderabad, Sind, and Govt Law College, Bombay, *m* Kamala P Jagtiani, February 1965, one son and one daughter, journalist, member, RSS since 1942, Secretary, RSS Karachi branch, 1947, and organized its work in Alwar, Bharatpur,

Kota, Bundi, and Jhalwar districts during 1947-51, joined Jana Sangh in 1951, Joint Secretary, Rajasthan State Jana Sangh, 1952-57, Secretary, Delhi State Jana Sangh, 1958-63, Vice-President of Delhi State Jana Sangh, 1965-67 and its President, 1970-72, Member, JS Central Executive since 1966, elected All India President of the party in February 1973, leader JS group in the Interim Metropolitan Council, Delhi, 1966-67, Chairman, Metropolitan Council, Delhi, 1967-70, elected to Rajya Sabha in 1970 Minister for Information & Broadcasting since March 1977

Travels Abroad—Czechoslovakia, UK, France, USSR, Yugoslavia, Austria, Switzerland, and Italy

Favourite Pastime and Recreation—Books, theatre, cinema, sports, and music

Special Interest—Electoral reform.

SOURCE—*Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha Who's Who, 1977-78*

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Kota, Bundi, and Jhalwar districts during 1947-51, joined Jana Sangh in 1951, Joint Secretary, Rajasthan State Jana Sangh, 1952-57, Secretary, Delhi State Jana Sangh, 1958-63, Vice-President of Delhi State Jana Sangh, 1965-67 and its President, 1970-72, Member, JS Central Executive since 1966, elected All India President of the party in February 1973, leader JS group in the Interim Metropolitan Council, Delhi, 1966 67, Chairman, Metropolitan Council, Delhi, 1967-70, elected to Rajya Sabha in 1970 Minister for Information & Broadcasting since March 1977

Travels Abroad—Czechoslovakia, UK, France, USSR, Yugoslavia, Austria, Switzerland, and Italy

Favourite Pastime and Recreation—Books, theatre, cinema, sports, and music

Special Interest—Electoral reform.

SOURCE—*Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha Who's Who, 1977-78*

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JANARDAN THAKUR was the first and perhaps the only one to predict Mrs Gandhi's Rae Bareli defeat in 1977 He has been on the national scene since 1961 and has worked as an Assistant Editor on the *Indian Nation*, in which position he created a stir by his hard hitting exposures of political corruption in Bihar

His reporting on the Bihar famine had a fine edge of sensitivity in bringing the desperate straits of the affected people feelingly into focus

He was also one of the first to bring the glaring rot that had set into Bihar universities out in the open

In 1971 he was selected as a Jefferson Fellow at the East-West Centre, Honolulu, USA

At present the author is Special Correspondent for the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* group of publications

Thakur is best known for his bestselling *All the Prime Minister's Men*

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